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'HE MUST REIGN'

And other Bible Studies

By

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The Ship where Christ was Captain, A Village down West, &c.

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To
CHARLES ENSOR WALTERS
In happy memory of years in
the West London Mission.

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‘HE MUST REIGN’

and other Bible Studies

I.

‘HE MUST REIGN’

1 Cor. xv. 25.

I STOOD the other day admiring a new locomotive. It bore resplendent a stately name. It was perfect, with all the latest inventions for speed. But it stood there useless for anything but admiration. ‘Fine,’ said one onlooker. ‘Grand,’ said another. Then each went on his way, the thing forgotten. It lacked the driving force that could turn it to any account.

There is the terrible thing in our religion—such splendid ideals, such sublime creeds, such eloquent sermons, but lacking the driving force that compels and sends it for service.

I shrink from beginning to write on these great words. ‘We believe it,’ we say. But we only believe it when we are reminded of it, and forthwith forget it—accepted and unheeded; an eloquent peroration for speech or sermon, and then done with. Surely it were better never to hear these words than suffer them to mean so little! To very many the thought of it is only a castle in the air, nothing more, and indeed rather less—lost in the mists as to the how and when of Christ’s triumph.

The Divine Necessity of the Universe.

HE MUST REIGN. If it means anything, it means everything. No castle in the air, it is the granite that underlies the world. The City of God hath foundations. *Must*—it is the divine necessity. It is the force that shapes the age, that compels to this one end its affairs day by day, year by year, through all things. As assuredly as all the past led up to the coming of the Lord Jesus, so assuredly is all the later time leading up to His sublime triumph. *He must reign.*

'When the fullness of time had come,' says St. Paul, 'God sent forth His Son.' All the ages had been flowing into that fullness. How perfectly was all controlled, how punctually set! A few years earlier or later the birth had not been at Bethlehem from distant Nazareth; a few years earlier or later Christ would not have been crucified. The Jewish power was steadily declining; the Roman power was steadily growing. It was that exact balance that determined the birth and death of the Saviour. To be enrolled at all was to the Jew a dreaded peril; to be enrolled for Roman taxation yet more abhorred. Too weak to resist the imperial decree, they are yet strong enough to demand that it shall be according to their own custom. Thus it is that Joseph and Mary must needs go to Bethlehem.

The superscription that Pilate set on the cross of the Saviour indicates again the balance of power. The Jewish authorities can bring the charge against Jesus; but Pilate alone can pass the sentence of death. If He die as they demand, yet shall it be by the Roman custom of crucifixion, not by the Jewish custom of stoning. Too strong for Pilate to defy them, yet is he strong enough to set up the superscription that they so bitterly resented: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*.

Although it is not for us to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power, yet it is for us to know assuredly, and to live in the assurance of it, that the times and seasons are in His power—that as He is the Lamb slain from the foundation, even so from the foundation of the world is He the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is good to find some great law of the universe. Think of Sir Isaac Newton standing in the orchard, the trees rich with the autumn tints, watching the fall of an apple. As he meditates there opens before him all the sweep of the law of gravitation—the force that keeps the sun in the heavens, that upholds the stars; no distant world but is subject to its control, and yet it directs the falling of an apple. Nothing can escape its control.

So is it in these words we find the divine necessity of the universe—*He must reign*. It opens to us all heights and depths;

it holds within itself all the past and all the future. It reaches up to the decree of the Almighty, and yet it comes down to every one of us—a thrill of rapture, an unfailing strength, a demand for the glad surrender of all we are, and all we have, and all we do: *He must reign.*

The Divine Necessity in Christ's Life.

Take the story of the Lord Jesus, and follow that word *must* as it meets us in His life.

The first is when the anxious mother after a weary journey finds Him sitting amongst the doctors of the law. With flushed face and trembling lip, she says, ‘Son, why hast Thou dealt thus with us?’ He turned with a look of wonder: ‘Why sought ye Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?’ If the mother could have seen into the depths of the reply, it must have seemed a lofty reply from the lips of the carpenter lad who had to go and be subject to His parents. Already that *must* controls the little round of His daily life.

Then there began to shape itself another *must*: ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up.’ It was the softened phrase with which men spake of that death too dreadful to be named in other words—the agony and shame of the Crucifixion. He stood on the threshold of His ministry. Nicodemus, a leading man and a ruler in Israel, had come to Him as a teacher come from God. He was doing works that none could do except God were with Him. The people have testified, ‘Never man spake as this Man.’ It seemed impossible that He could come to such an end. But that *must* controls events, and the antagonism of the law and the force of the Roman combine to set up the cross. He *must* be lifted up.

There is yet another *must*. It is when the shadow of the cross is upon Him, when the soldiers and servants of the high priest have come with swords and staves to take Him. Peter, indignant, draws his sword to defend his Lord. With outstretched hand Jesus bade him put up his sword: ‘Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall

presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scripture be fulfilled that thus it *must* be?' The devotion of His followers and the ministry of the angels must not stay that awful necessity: He *must* be lifted up.

Yet another *must*. It is at the break of day: the darkness sinks before the golden dawn. They knew not the *scripture* that He must rise again from the dead. Death itself is subject to that necessity; and the grave must yield to its compulsion.

Then comes that which completes them all—lacking which all else were undone. This is the divine necessity, the compulsion of all things is this: *He must reign*.

The Great Question for Every One is this:

How best can we serve the King in His claim on the kingdom of the world? Surely it should be to us not only the supreme purpose of our religion, but the supreme purpose of our being. Let us look up and ask Him, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' The Lord Himself answers us: '*When ye pray say, Thy Kingdom come.*' The dependence of the Almighty on our prayer is a mystery. Its end is not only for our fitness in the Kingdom; it is a power that affects the doing of His will on earth, even as it is done in heaven. It is a vast, a terrible responsibility. 'Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers into the harvest' means that without labourers the harvest cannot be gathered, and that our prayers can bring forth the labourers. The command is almost an entreaty. Here, then, is our first service—to that let us pledge ourselves—that in no mere form of words, but as the utterance of our soul's longing, we pray, '*Thy Kingdom come.*'

Yet another answer is there. About their risen Lord the eager disciples gathered. 'Lord, wilt Thou bring to Thy sway the kingdoms of the world?' This was in effect the question, and so we may put it: 'Thou hast triumphed over all Thy foes, over Roman and Pharisee, over Death and Hell; and now Thou art come forth in the power of Thy resurrection, and wilt Thou complete Thy triumph and claim the kingdoms of the world?' Thus the Church stands, looking up with wonder and longing:

‘Lord, wilt Thou assert Thine authority, and claim the nations for Thine own?’

Note well the answer—the answer for all the ages. Jesus bent over them and said ‘Ye.’ They looked up: He looked down. They thought it rested with Him. He laid the work upon them. ‘Ye—ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me.’ Then, as if there were nothing further to be said or done, while they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Look at it. Think of it. A hundred and twenty men and women, without special gifts of wisdom or speech, without money—that great essential to church work!—having to get their living by common daily toil, busied with all the round of daily duties—yet they are to begin the triumph of Christ, to them is entrusted a work which is to turn the world upside down! None so exalted but the influence of this lowly company shall reach them, until the throne of the Caesars is claimed for Christ; none so far off but the power of this little company shall extend to them, until the world is knit into a brotherhood. This is Christ’s idea of Christianity: the idea not of man—it is infinitely too sublime—the idea of God.

What concerns us, above all else, is that we give ourselves with all our hearts to Christ for the fulfilment of His largest purposes. Accept the call and claim which come from Him.

This is the meaning and purpose of our religion. That which alone can save even our religion from a supreme selfishness—that we should surrender every man his own little world to God for His good pleasure to be filled with His glory. He does best for God’s great world who makes the Kingdom of God supreme in his own little world.

Our Oath of Allegiance.

In the blessed assurance of these words let us take our oath of allegiance to the King.

There have been times in the history of our nation, as of other nations, when the fortunes of royalty have fallen low. Many enemies have risen against the monarch, and have threatened his

sway. It may be the king has hidden, his hiding-place known only to the most devoted and trusted of his followers. For his sake, houses, lands, treasured heirlooms, plate, jewellery, their all had been turned into money for his treasury. Men have made their dwelling-place a fortress, and held it against all odds for their king, with peril on every side, famine, fire, death. They with their sons and dependants have gone forth to die, if need be. All they had was his to set him once again on the throne. No records are there in history of more splendid heroism, more desperate courage, more prolonged endurance. How shall we think of the claims of our Lord and King? If loyalty to any earthly monarch could prompt such devotion, what have we for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and for our sakes laid down His life? If for kings whose tyranny or unfitness for the throne was often the cause of their ill-fortune, yet whose name and claim could inspire such service, what have we for Him whose life and love is an unfailing love, who for the welfare of His people faced without fear the cruellest death of shame and suffering that man could die, even the death of the Cross?

For those of whom we have spoken there was a future, vague and uncertain. But for our King to doubt is treason, to fear is blasphemy. The daring words of the psalmist are inspired: 'Let the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and against His Anointed. *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.*' Can assurance of His triumph be more complete? 'Yet have I set My King upon Zion, the hill of holiness.'

Let us remember how the Lord Jesus in the time when He was exceeding sorrowful, craving for their sympathy, came upon His disciples asleep, and woke them with the appeal, '*Could ye not watch with Me one hour?*' A thousand times worse is it if the great Captain of our salvation comes and finds us enrolled in His ranks, numbered amongst His soldiers and servants, yet without enthusiasm for Him or His cause, without enterprise for His Kingdom—alas! it may be grudging anything that is a

sacrifice for His service. How should we speak of it? How can we rouse men to the shame, the disgrace of such disloyalty? Are we wrong or uncharitable if we reckon that of those who think and call themselves Christians there are very, very few who think for a moment of being His soldiers and servants—eager for gain, grudging nothing for our own indulgence, jealous of position, content with attendance at a religious service on Sunday, and then going forth without any determined purpose, without any worthy effort, to hasten or extend His Kingdom?

That face was filled of old with grief, there was a tone of wonder in the reproof, ‘Could ye not watch with Me one hour?’ Our sleep, alas! ends not with the day, not with the week, nor with the year. Is it with despair that the further word must be spoken, as if it were of no avail: ‘*Sleep on, and take your rest.*’

The Psalm of the Cross.

There are few things in Scripture more wonderful than to set side by side the Psalm with its vision of the Crucifixion and the account of the Crucifixion in the Gospels. This, says C. H. Spurgeon, ‘is beyond all others *The Psalm of the Cross*. It begins with, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,” and it ends according to some, in the original with, “It is finished.” It is the photograph of the Lord’s saddest hours, the lachrymatory of His last tears, the record of His dying words. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read it reverently, putting off our shoes from our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush; for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is here.’

Prophecy is a miracle of revelation and nowhere more miraculous than here. How could it have come to the psalmist except by a vision from God? It is of all things the very last that would occur to the Jewish mind. It cut across all the hope of Israel, destroyed in that terrible death. Yet under a divine compulsion he is constrained to declare that which he has seen and heard. And, yet again, let us ask, Whence came any knowledge of crucifixion itself? It was probably never heard of,

certainly never seen. Yet here it is set forth in all minute detail. Only a miracle of revelation can explain it.

Go over it verse by verse. The prophecy becomes history. There is the cry, its terrible beginning: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' That voice, says a German rationalist, of utter loneliness in the death struggle, *that entirely credible utterance, because it could never have been invented.*¹ There is the cruel mocking of the crowd: 'All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn.' He sees them with awful reality: 'They shoot out the lip, they shake the head.' Long, long years before it happened, he hears their words: 'He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him. Let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him.' He sees the soldiers at the foot of the cross casting lots for His vesture: 'They pierced My hands and My feet.' So hangs before him the crucified Redeemer of Israel; so comes the cry, 'It is finished.'

Now let us follow the prophecy further. There is no break. The vision moves on to its end. The voice is the same. Suddenly the darkness dies in the dawn of a glorious day. The cross gives place to a throne, the thorns to a crown. He who was stripped of His raiment comes forth in regal majesty. That which has been fulfilled in the prophecy is but part of that which waits to be fulfilled. We cannot separate the Crucifixion from the Coronation. 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the Kingdom is the Lord's: and He is governor among the nations.' So does that 'It is finished' of the psalm link itself with the words of the apostle: 'Then cometh the end . . . for He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet.'

Half the battle lies in knowing the strength of the foe. 'If only I could see the other side of that hill,' said Wellington. The Lord Jesus has triumphed over all that could threaten and oppose Him. Henceforth the Conqueror must reign, King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹ Schenkel, quoted by Bishop Alexander.

II.

PARTNERSHIP IN MIRACLES

‘His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you do it.’—John ii. 5.

THERE is a not uncommon notion that the Lord Jesus stood in His conscious superiority and wrought the miracle, and that those about Him were to do the ordinary and commonplace. ‘Roll away the stone’—‘Loose him and let him go.’ ‘Bring him hither to Me.’

It is not possible to think of anything more unlike all that the Lord Jesus set Himself to be. He was in all things one of the people, one for the people, one with the people.

There were at least three ways in which it was held that religion was to declare itself. *The first was in its looks*—the long face, perhaps a somewhat nasal twang, a severity of tone, a stern glance. Now Jesus condemned this religion of looks. ‘Even when you fast,’ said He, ‘do not be of a sad countenance.’ Be simple: do not mark yourself off from others by look or tone. God makes little round faces and sends them into the world and the Master would not have us make them long. The least attractive goodness is the goodness that tries to look good.

Then religion was to proclaim itself in the dress. Jesus would not wear the dress of the prophet: the robe of the rabbi. He would not array Himself with their phylacteries. He wore the dress of the working man. ‘Is not this the carpenter?’ There is no conceit more subtle than that which proclaims its superiority in its dress.

Then the Master denounced the display of religion in long prayers and trumpeted alms. ‘Do not make a parade of your religion,’ said He. ‘When you pray enter into your room and

pray to your Father in secret. And when you give, let not your left hand know what your right hand does.'

Now as in all else so was it in His miracles—the very friend and brother of all He would share with them the joy of doing good. Think at the raising of Lazarus as his friends began to perceive the purpose of the Master how eagerly they would long to have some part in it, however little. So is the word given, 'Roll away the stone.' It was their joyful share in it all. And as Lazarus rose, wrapped in the grave clothes, theirs was the unutterable gladness to loosen them and let the light of those eyes and the life of that face appear with its unearthly welcome.

Think, again, of the graciousness that at the feeding of the multitude could take the lad with his basket of fish and bread into partnership with Him; and how He found room for the service of the disciples.

What a gracious kindness was it to accept the help of those about Him. It is in perfect keeping with His goodness. There are those to whom an offer of help is an offence, a slight on their superiority. Jesus loved to share with those about Him the joy of doing good.

Let us set the scene of the miracle before us. A marriage in the East is always a matter of much greater festivity than with us. It was a poor household, and to want wine or other provision would have been an outrage of hospitality unpardonable by the guests. It was on the mother of Jesus that the burden of preparation rested and who became responsible for the supply.

At one end of the apartment is the portion that was the guest-chamber. Beyond it were the mother and servants busied in the preparation for the feast and in waiting on the guests.

Now comes Jesus with some of His disciples. He needed, as they did, rest and refreshment; but whilst the others tarried in the guest-chamber, welcomed by the governor of the feast, Jesus is with His mother and the servants. He who came, not to be ministered unto but to minister, finds His place with them. It

were well indeed if we ever remembered His example and His bidding. His command is, 'Let him who is your minister be your servant man.' How different had been the history of the Church, and how different the position of the Church to-day, had that command been obeyed! 'Be towelled with humility,' said St. Peter, as if we were ever to be ready for the lowliest ministry and service.

How the Partnership Begins.

The anxious mother comes in her trouble: 'They have no wine.'

Thus do miracles begin—seeing the want of those about us, and setting ourselves with eagerness to meet it. Look at it in the case of Moses, the greatest of the miracle-workers. There is a man who sees the miseries of his people, who makes those miseries his own, surrendering for their sakes all the splendour of the court and the possibility of the throne. And through him God wrought their triumph over the might of Pharaoh and his armed hosts, and led them into the goodly land. That yearning pity lies ever at the heart of the miracle. The Heavenly Father, who waits to fulfil our prayers, waits ever to fulfil that pity. From Him it comes. He prompts it, and His power waits to accomplish it. Look at the amazing number of societies that have risen within the last sixty or seventy years— orphanages, homes, the blessed provision for the poor, the societies for the prevention of cruelty. Surely no age has seen so many miracles; and the coming age shall see yet greater things than these.

As an illustration take the story of Mr. Spurgeon's Orphanage. It had been laid upon his mind that, in addition to the great work which he was doing at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he should found an orphanage. As he said, 'The God that answereth by orphanages let Him be God.' But how was he to set about it? Away in the north of London was a clergyman's widow to whom came a similar impression. She had £20,000 at her disposal on which there were no claimants or dependants, and she resolved to devote this to the work of founding an orphanage. In consultation with a friend on the matter, he suggested, it is said to his own surprise, the name of Mr. Spurgeon. It was equally

a surprise to the lady. The offer of the £20,000 was made, and forthwith Mr. Spurgeon proceeded with his orphanage.

This yearning Christlike pity is the supreme need of the world, the eager compassion that cannot get away from the thought of its wants and its sorrows—that dreams of it, and plans and toils for its remedy as other men toil for fame and fortune. The deadliest heresy and the steepest downgrade that any Church can get on is to be content with a religion that lacks the loving and yearning heart of Jesus Christ. The greatest hindrance to the Kingdom of God is that smug religion that sings very sweetly of its own little heaven, but is all forgetful of the sheep without a shepherd that are, alas! so tired and often have no place to lie down. The divine compassion must dwell in us richly, or we have no right to the name of Jesus Christ.

The Contagion of a Loving Purpose.

Turn again to the story of the wedding. Jesus said, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.'

The word seems harsh, repellent. But we need to hear His voice, to see His face. Judge of these by the result. The mother came with a complaint; but she hurried away with a wondering expectation and confidence, and turned to the servants with the bidding, 'Whatsoever He saith unto you do it.'

So sometimes has a cloud risen in the heavens dark and threatening; but it got the sun behind it, and was melted into nothingness. The mother saw His face behind the words, and they were melted into tenderness.

Then Jesus said, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' How wellnigh impossible to work a miracle through a committee! Who of us does not know the man who would have said at once, 'What! Fill the waterpots with water! Whatever for? We don't want water, we want wine. The whole thing is a mistake.'

God can do anything with simple souls who are ready to do His bidding with a glad obedience, prompt and unquestioning. But those who are always ready to see difficulties and make objections defeat the miracle. It is a terrible power. *He could there do no mighty work.* The need so great, the love yearning

to bless, the power almighty—yet all undone! Omnipotence made powerless!

Let us remember that we dare not be content with doing less than our best when God waits to do for us His best. When we do only what we can, we do without God.

It is good to turn to the servants and to see how they catch from the mother the confidence that she has found in Jesus. Blessed is the contagion of a loving purpose! We see them hurrying away to the well and back again, and yet again, until the waterpots are filled to the brim. We can understand why the Lord Jesus chose simple fishermen to be His disciples. He could do nothing with the scribes and Pharisees, who thought they knew so much, and were always trying to prove it.

Faith's Splendid Venture.

Then Jesus said, 'Draw out now, and bear to the governor of the feast.'

It was indeed an audacious thing to do, to dip the jug into the water-jar, and then to go to the guests offering wine! The Revised Version indicates that whilst being poured it then became wine. Faith is always a splendid venture, as when Peter, at the bidding of the Master, walked on the sea, and found it as an adamant floor. A venture, as when the eagle thrusts its young into the empty air that it may find its wings, so faith unfolds within us a new and divine faculty, which sees Him who is invisible and finds all things made possible.

We set before us the picture of the guests chatting together of village matters as the servants come to give them the wine. As each sips it there is a silence. Then says the governor of the feast to the bridegroom, 'Well, this is wine indeed. You have kept the best wine till the last.' And there is a chorus of praise as one and another partake of it.

Was it intoxicating? Some say confidently, Yes; others as confidently say, No. In that matter men will believe what they prefer. The best answer is that of good Josiah Nix when challenged by a publican. He took up the glass of water before him and said, 'My Master made His wine of good water. When

you make the beer of the same thing, I will drink some of it.' The publican joined in the laugh that followed.

Secrecy of the Miracle.

That on which we should specially dwell is the *secrecy of the miracle*. The governor of the feast knew not whence it was, but His mother and the servants which drew the water knew.

To have such power and to have done such a work and yet to keep it secret is the very living picture of the meek and lowly Jesus. It was a tender and beautiful considerateness that would hide the poverty of the mother. That was all unsuspected.

In nothing do we need more grace than in seeking to meet the needs and heal the wounds of others. No hand can afford to minister to such but the hand of love. Mere duty is too cold, too hard; it bruises whilst it binds; it hurts whilst it heals. Our great organizations and efforts to save may fail for lack of this divine compassion. Love, tender and gracious love alone can turn the water into wine. You cannot turn it into wine by making a fuss about it. Christlike love alone can teach us how to touch the wounds of our poor humanity, without hurting them. Love, wise, clear-seeing love, alone can keep our service from becoming either an offence or a degradation. Charity dressed as a relieving officer is apt to have more of the officer than of charity. There are 'precious balms' that do break men's heads, and hearts, too, fiery balsams that burn instead of soothe. Great deep eager compassion alone can fit us for service, and that compassion can only be ours by contact with Jesus Christ and with the people, as the disciples learned of old.

Is not this the very purpose and proof of our religion—in the name of the Master and for His sake to perpetuate the miracle of turning the common water of life into wine? Have we not met with some who carried with them an influence that was a glow, a sunshine that turned the winter of our discontent into a summer gladness? They ministered to us the wine of the Kingdom of Heaven of which the Master spoke.

The presence and words of the Blessed Lord were ever of good

cheer. It came to the disciples in their peril and fear; a glow, a confidence, a defiance.

What a picture waits for the artist in that scene of the two voices in the story of Jairus. The messenger comes through the crowd, his face and the whispered tidings make room for him, and he stands at the side of his Master, a presence of grief and gloom. 'Thy daughter is dead.' On the other side stands the Lord Jesus, a presence of sunshine and even here of good cheer—'Fear not, thy daughter shall live.' There is on one side the mournful despair; on the other side the glow of hope and boundless confidence.

And lest the example of the Lord Jesus seems to be far out of our reach and effort take the story of St. Paul in the time of the shipwreck. There is the howl of the storm, the sweep of angry seas, the rocks black above the foam threatening their death. But in their midst there is one, a prisoner, yet more than captain and soldiers and crew, a presence that not only controlled them all, but was as the wine of the Kingdom of Heaven to every heart, and 'they were all of good cheer.' He who lives in the sunshine and joy of the Lord is earth's best stimulant.

III.

THE FRIENDS OF JESUS

John xv.

LET us join the little company in the Upper Room, and listen eagerly to that last appeal. The sacred memories of the Crucifixion compel within us the longing that He should see in us the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Let us linger over His words until we are fully surrendered for such a blessed ministry to our Master. That it is possible is the demand on our love and obedience.

We must take for our study the fifteenth chapter of St. John's gosopel—the parable of the vine.

Three Key Words.

There are three key words. The first word is fruit. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away. In the vine it is fruit or nothing. I was preaching in Dr. Andrew Murray's church in South Africa, and was reading this chapter. I turned and asked him, 'What is the good of a vine if you do not get grapes out of it?' His reply was instant—'Capital firewood. Men gather them and they are burned.'

Fruit is the vegetable life given away. Pass down the street and look at the fruit shops—oranges, bananas, apples, pears. Here is the fruit, but the trees are rooted and fixed far away. The fruit is sent for the happy refreshment of the people. The vine is worth what it gives away.

He that abideth in Me, and I in him, bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing.

We all accept that at once, without Him we can do nothing. But there is another side of vast importance that we overlook. There is that mysterious dependence of Him on us. The root says to the branch without me you can do nothing. But the branch says to the root, without me you can do nothing. There

is no fruit in the root, the fruit is in the branch. The root gives its life to the branch that the branch may give its fruit to the world. The world can only see Him in us. We bring to the world the proof that our Saviour is the source of the true life.

The next key word is *love*. We all know what love is. Poets sing of it; philosophers analyse it. But who can define it? Here it is. As fruit is the vine given away, so is love the life of God and man given away. You cannot separate love from that giving. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He loved me and gave Himself for me. The sun is worth the light and heat it gives away. And we are worth the life we give away. So are we one with the highest Heaven and with the fruits of the earth through love.

The third key word is *joy*. These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. It is almost startling to find the Lord Jesus speaking of His joy, when His soul was exceeding sorrowful, and when so near was that awful death of the Cross. It is a sun—burst through the darkness in which He sees what lies beyond it all—who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame. The joy of Jesus is a more glorious fullness of giving.

Let us meditate on it until we feel all the force of this truth. He who is the root gives Himself to the branch that through the branch His Life may flow in fruit into the world, and in His giving of the life we are to find His joy and our fullness of joy. I am the vine, ye are the branches.

Ye are My friends if ye love one another.—This is My commandment. There is but one—keep that and we keep all—that ye love one another even as I have loved you. Here we may well think—for us, alas, can it ever be possible to love with a love so infinite as His love to us? Yet let us be bold to take the words, with the assurance that the very command is the pledge of grace to fulfil it.

What is friendship? To be at home with one; to find an open

door, to throw off all reserve, to open the innermost heart. Ye are those, says the Lord Jesus, with whom I can make Myself at home, if ye love one another.

The Lord Jesus wrote seven letters and never sent His love. St. Paul could not write without a greeting for many friends. There were those living to whom a word of remembrance from their Lord would have been as the breath of Heaven. But at the end of the letter comes the postscript—Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man will hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him. He never sends His love, He always brings it.

The door that is shut against any is shut against Him. *Ye are My friends if*—— Does the Lord pause at that word 'if'? Do the troubled disciples look up and hint that there could be any doubt or question as to their friendship? But there stands that stern 'if'—if ye love one another. It was a backward look of terrible appeal. *The moment they began to dispute amongst themselves, that moment they ceased to be His friends.* From that moment the Lord is left in awful loneliness. They are coming down from the mount, and when they reach the house, Jesus said, 'What was it that ye disputed so angrily as ye came along the way?' If He had been with them He would not have asked. Think of it! He alone, facing all that awaited Him in Jerusalem, and on the breeze there came the noisy wrangling as to who should be the greatest.

Then they are in the way going up to Jerusalem. 'And as they followed they were afraid.' He alone, going as if out for some desperate purpose. Then He stops, and again tells them how it was all to end. Then there came one desiring to speak to Him. The quarrel has opened, and here is the mother of John and James claiming the first place for her sons. That dispute unfitted them for friendship—their thought was absorbed each for his own. And yet still more dreadful was it at the last supper, when the Lord, as if realizing all the agony of that death, went from one to another—This is My body which is broken for you; this is My blood which is shed for you. There, then, as if their Lord

were all forgotten, even in such an hour, there was a dispute among them as to who should be the greatest.

So stood that stern condition of friendship with Him; so stands it for us as for them. He who shuts the door against any shuts the door against Him. Alas! who has not proved it?—some outbreak of angry temper; some old feud and ill-will; some greedy grasp for gain or ambition, unbrotherly; some cruel breath of scorn—and the friendship is broken. He stands again outside the door alone: and we sit alone in the inner chamber of the heart.

Ye are My friends, if ye love one another.

‘Ye are My friends if ye love one another.’ Let us try to get into the heart of these words, for that is to get at the heart of the Lord Jesus.

What is He thinking of here—‘Ye are My friends if ye love Me’? No, not that. Such a thought had been but natural. In My grief and agony if ye are My friends, bring Me your presence, your love, your confidence.

Some years ago a very dear friend came to see me in London. The moment I came into the room I saw the white face, the quivering lip, the nervous twitch.

‘What is the matter?’ I said.

‘I have had to come to London to consult a physician, and he says I must undergo such an operation.’

I sat down at his side, for I knew how serious the operation was. ‘Is there anything in the world that I can do for you?’ I said eagerly.

‘Yes. I have come to ask a great favour. I want you to be with me in the operation. If I have you at my side and can grasp your hand I shall get through it.’

‘Of course, of course I will be with you,’ I said.

That is the natural thing at such an hour. But the word He speaks is—that ye love one another. Again we ask what is the Lord thinking of here?

We make a mistake in quoting the words—the *world* shall not

see me. I pray not for the world, if we take as meaning that the world was shut out of His thoughts.

Surely He who loved the world well enough to give Himself for it, never loved the world so much as when He was going out of it. He stands looking down through the ages as if saying within Himself, 'Poor, poor world, it shall see Me no more. I have comforted the sad heart; I have gathered the outcasts; I have healed their sorrows; I have blessed its little children. Ye are My dearly beloved (such is the word) if through you I can go on living My life of love, if in your eyes I can look My pity; if in your lips I can breathe My love; if in your hands I can stretch out My help; if in your feet I can walk the weary world.' That is the only Christianity, Christ living over again that life of love. This is My commandment that ye love one another even as I have loved you.

'It is expedient,' said He, 'that I go away.'

'Master,' the disciples might have said, 'Go not away.' If Thou goest away all time is darkened and the ages are undone. 'It is expedient, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you.' 'But, Master, why the Comforter?' 'That ye may be strengthened with might in the inner man that Christ may dwell in your heart.' What is it but a multiplying of the Incarnation a million fold, living in us over again His life of love.

And only loving one another can we know God. We know about God by books and sermons, but it is only he that loveth knoweth God, and he that loveth not knoweth not God.

Every bit of common kindness, every bit of friendly help, every bit of tender compassion, every forgiveness of wrong, every glad service of love is a revelation of God.

The only Christianity that can satisfy the Lord Jesus, that can satisfy ourselves, that can satisfy the world is to live over again His life of love. Ye are My dearly beloved if ye love one another.

'Ye are My friends if ye love one another.' Where love is

there God is. And where God is we may look for the miracles of His grace.

One of the Sisters in the West London Mission was asked to visit a girl who had been expelled from a Reformatory, who had been in prison several times, and was only twenty-one years of age.

The Sister went to the gaol, and the girl was brought into the room, eyes flashing, teeth set, all defiance as she said angrily, 'I'm not going into a home.'

'Oh, Mary,' said the Sister, 'I heard about you and I was so sorry for you.'

'You were what? *Sorry* for me?' Then the look and tone softened, 'Nobody was ever sorry for me before.'

Think of it—nobody had ever been sorry for her. The matron of the Reformatory had said, 'You are a very naughty girl.' The Lady President had said, 'You are a *very, very* naughty girl.' So said the police. So said the magistrate. And it did not make her better. You may scold folks into Hell; you can never scold them into Heaven. You must lift them as the sun lifts the clouds by shining.

'When I heard about you, I said to myself, what should I like anybody to do for me if I were Mary?'

Again the girl started. Could this Sister, even in thought, put herself on a level with Mary? 'What did you think then?' said she eagerly.

'Well, I thought there might be somebody I should like to send my love to. Is there anybody, Mary, that you would like me to take your love to?'

The girl's lips quivered. 'Yes,' she said, 'there's my little brother. He's only six years old; and he has nobody to see to him when I am here.'

'Mary,' said the Sister, 'I will go and see him, and see that he's taken care of until you come out. He and I will be at the prison door to meet you.'

Then Mary broke down. 'Sister, I believe I could be good if other people were only like you.'

I have space only to finish my story. A few days later I found Mary in the Home, singing at her work. As I shook hands I said cheerily, 'I thought you weren't going into a home, Mary.'

'Home,' said Mary. 'This ain't a Home; it's *Heaven*.'

Love is of God, and is mighty with the might of the Almighty.

Ye are My friends if ye love one another.

One of the most beautiful things in the character of the Lord Jesus is this—He always had leisure for friendship. He sometimes had no leisure so much as to eat, but He always had leisure for friendship, come who would, or when, or where.

What a long way we are from each other. Some seem to carry a notice outside them—'No admission except on business'—and some a notice, 'Knock and ring,' or even further, 'Ring twice,' and then they may not be at home. And yet further off are some, as if within stone walls and iron gates.

But to think of the Lord Jesus is to see the cottage in the country where the roses and jessamine grow about the porch; and the sunshine slants over the passage; and the children sit singing on the doorstep; and almost before you pass the garden gate the good wife comes with kindest greeting.

That is the Lord Jesus. His heart has no bolt, no bar—it is ever on the latch. He is always at home when we come to see Him. Forth He comes ever with His loving greeting—*Ye are My friends.*

IV.

A STORY OF THE RESURRECTION

LET us try to make it real and living as of to-day. The Lord Mayor of Jerusalem has summoned the City Council on a matter of utmost urgency, and addresses them:

‘You are doubtless aware that this arch-impostor, Jesus of Nazareth, whom we have already threatened with death, is again in the city. We must without delay take all measures to secure Him. I shall be glad to hear any suggestions on the matter.’

‘Well,’ says one, ‘we must be very careful. He has many devoted followers. We must remember the crowded condition of the city at this time. A conflict with the people will give an excuse for the Roman authorities to take from us our few remaining privileges. There must be a force sufficient to prevent any interference on the part of the people. It will be well to ask the Roman Governor to send the centurion with a hundred soldiers, and fifty of our own police should go armed with swords and staves.’

So it was agreed. And the Lord Mayor adds, ‘I understand one of his most intimate followers has accepted a bribe to betray Him so that there shall be no mistake.’

The meeting was dismissed.

Now it is near midnight. The Lord Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, pacing to and fro; now hidden in the shade of the trees, now stepping forth in the clear light of the Passover moon. There is the coming of a crowd, and we see the gleam of torch and lantern. They have gathered at the garden gate—a great multitude with swords and staves. At once Jesus, facing them, says, ‘Have you come out as against a thief and a robber? Here am I. Take Me.’

Enraged that they should have been sent on such an errand to find one who offers no resistance, but instantly surrenders, the soldiers roughly take hold of Him to bind their prisoner. Peter’s

eyes flash with indignation. Shall these brutal soldiers lay hands upon his Lord! Out flies his sword and he smites at one of them.

Think what would happen to-day if such a thing occurred. A coarse laugh greets him. 'Does he think he is going to fight the lot of us! Have at him.'

Peter's life was not worth a moment's purchase. Swords are drawn and staves uplifted. Then with the strange authority which Jesus manifested at times, with outstretched hand He kept back the crowd. 'Let him alone,' He said, and Peter was saved.

And now the soldiers, used to all brutality on the battlefield, proceed to bind Him with the leather thongs. The gleam of torch and lantern falls on helmet and armour as they bend to pull the thongs, until the blood spurts from His wrists. And He, with face uplifted said, 'Thinkest thou not that I could even now pray to My Father in Heaven, and He should instantly give Me twelve legions of angels?' This was the glory of the Lord Jesus. Others have been crucified as He was crucified, but none else ever went forth conscious that he had but to will it, and a splendid deliverance should immediately be his. 'No man taketh My life from Me,' said Jesus. 'I lay down My life.'

Then the soldiers go on their way with their prisoner bound and guarded, thrusting back the excited crowd as they move along the narrow streets to the Judgement Hall.

Now let us turn to Peter. We must be careful not to lose the man in the saint. Here is one of like passions with ourselves, and of fiercer passions than most men.

Remember how that when the Lord Jesus began to tell the disciples of the terrible things that were to befall him Peter dared to lay his hands upon the Lord—took hold of Him and began to rebuke Him. Jesus looked at him with indignation and spoke those terrible words—*Get thee hence, Satan*. Such a man is it that we must set before us—rash, impulsive, swept away by the moods of the moment. No coward is he—a fighting man as well as a fisherman.

Let us think of some castle wall up which the ivy has climbed

to the utmost height, and flung the wealth of its greenery about the summit. So was it that with clinging faith and hope and passionate devotion Peter's whole soul had reached through his Lord to highest things—things sublime in Heaven, and things splendid in that kingdom which he looked for on earth, and in which he was to be the first and foremost.

Think that some earthquake terrific, has hurled down the castle wall, and the ivy is crushed, broken, buried. The events of that hour were an earthquake that shattered Peter's faith and hope and left it a black ruin. When the Lord was bound and led away helpless in the hands of those who were going to kill Him, Peter had nothing left to which he could cling: hope had nothing to live for. Was that the end of it all—of Him whose life was love, whose words were light; mighty to save others, blessing all men! Could there be any goodness, any truth, any justice? Could indeed there be a God in Heaven, seated on His throne, amidst the angel hosts, and never strike a blow in defence of His well-beloved Son? In the fury of that storm Peter had lost all anchorage: he is flung hither and thither, the sport of these cruel blasts. Hell seemed to mock with horrid laughter at all truth and goodness.

As one who staggers in the gloom and tempest, Peter followed afar off: not in fear but bewildered, to whom there is no pathway, no foothold.

Now at the door of the Judgement Hall we can think that, for a moment, there came a lull in the storm—pity for his Lord stirred all within him. Then he sees one of the guard beside Jesus lift his hand and smite Him with a ringing blow—and Jesus, with quivering lip, said, 'Why smitest thou Me?'

Then all the fury of Peter's indignation swept over him again; and again came Hell's laughter that mocked at truth and goodness. Tennyson gives us the phrase *drunk with loss*. Never was it truer of any than of Peter at that hour. Bewildered, distraught, he joins the company of the soldiers at the entrance—at once a chorus greets him as one of the disciples, with oaths he swears he never knew Him—then is heard the crowing of

the cock—and Peter comes to himself. He turns in agony to look at his Lord. In tenderest pity the Lord looks on Peter. That look broke his heart. Out he rushed into the dark and found some lonely place where he flung himself down and wept—wept bitterly. In that flood of tears the storm spent itself, and in that agony of repentance.

Let us try for a moment to imagine the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as an invention. Think of these simple fishermen coming together in their great grief.

'He is gone,' sighs one. 'And such an end to it all,' sighs another. 'What shall we do?'

Let us think if we can that one of them should say, 'Let us give it out that He is risen from the dead.'

If such a thing had been possible the suggestion might naturally follow that everything must be in keeping with it. Let an earthquake roll away the stone. And on it let an angel appear all white and glittering. As the women come at dawn to anoint His body with spices let the angel greet them with the tidings—'He is not here: He is risen. Go, tell the disciples, and——'

Now comes a pause. 'Go, tell the disciples, and——' They who had so lately disputed among themselves who should be the greatest would surely hesitate to name any for such a distinction.

'Go, tell the disciples and *His mother*.' That would do. Let her who had His last thought on earth have the message of this greeting. No, it is not that. Now is our imagination of such a patience utterly lost.

Go tell the disciples—and whom?

Certainly none of them would have said Peter. He had ceased to be a disciple as surely as Judas. And that was not all. The long continued and bitter dispute between them and the jealousy of his pre-eminence was ended by Peter's fall. To send a message so distinct and important would renew and intensify the dispute.

'Go, tell the disciples and Peter.' That had never been invented. Peter, who denied his Lord with oaths and curses!

That is not the thought of any man. It is only from the lips and from the love of the Lord Jesus that there could come such a message. There is the sign manual of the Saviour, 'Go, tell the disciples *and Peter*.' That is not human; but utterly divine.

The women hurry on their way with the glad tidings, and meet with Peter. 'He is risen,' they say, 'and the angel bade us go and tell the disciples.'

Peter waves his hand as if to say, 'Go and tell them. I, alas, am no more one of the disciples.'

'And the angel said we must go and tell Peter.' Wondering, as if yet doubtful, he asks, 'Did he mention my name?'

'Yes, yours was the only name he mentioned. He said, "Go, tell the disciples *and Peter*."' '

What words can tell all that it meant to him?

'Oh, my Lord! Is my name on Thy lips! Hast Thou yet a place in Thine heart for me?'

Then again later in the day when the company were gathered almost afraid to believe the wonderful tidings of their Lord's resurrection, one came in with haste to confirm it—Christ is risen and hath appeared—we can think how eagerly they waited to know the name of one favoured above all of them—*hath appeared to Simon*. Simon! They had never denied Him as Simon had done. Their hearts were breaking with longing to see their Lord. What had Simon done that a second time he should be chosen for such a favour? Had their Master forgotten their more steadfast devotion?

Again it is not human—it is all divine. Let us recall the Lord's parable of the lost sheep. 'What has become of the shepherd?' said one and another of the ninety and nine. 'Gone away in haste, and I heard Him say He did not know when He would be back. He might have to go over the moors and through the floods, and might not be back until night.'

'Whatever for?' said the rest of the flock.

'Why, for that silly sheep that went astray a little while ago.'

'Does He care more then for a silly sheep that goes astray than he does for us who have never gone astray at all?'

There is the story completely told. It is for the lost sheep that the shepherd goes seeking in all lonely and perilous places, seeking diligently; and when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders and bringeth it home with 'rejoicing.'

He does most, for them that need Him most. He goes farthest off for those that have gone farthest off. He goes lowest down for those that have gone lowest down.

The story is one that the disciples could never have invented. It is not human; it is all divine. As we read it we too rejoice in the triumphant fact—*He is risen*.

We come to the last chapter of our story. Here, too, all is divine. No invention could have given such a scene of exquisite love.

Peter has gone with the other disciples to meet their risen Lord in Galilee. They reach the point from which they look down on the shore where lie the fishing boats and the nets. Peter could only look at everything in the light of that cruel denial; it made all else impossible. It may well be that there came to him the memory of how the Lord had bidden him leave the nets to become a fisher of men. But never again could he be trusted with any such high calling. There had come the Saviour's love and forgiveness, but it had brought with it no fitness for service. For him nothing was left but to get back to the nets, not for a night only, such as the others might share with him, but henceforth for a lifetime.

Then comes the dawn and the greeting of the Saviour—'My lads'—that is the word—'have you anything to eat?' They hasten on shore to find that He had kindled the fire, and made ready the fish, and bids them come to breakfast.

We see the group gathered about Him, wondering, rejoicing—their risen Lord yet the same kindly and gracious Master.

Peter lies on the beach, longing that he could speak to Jesus, yet shrinking with the memory of that dreadful night.

Then the pierced hand is laid tenderly on him—'Dost thou love Me, Simon?'²

'All his soul rushes forth in eager declaration—' Oh, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

Why ask him again and yet again, 'Dost thou love Me?' No doubt was it; but as Peter would ever carry the memory of that thrice denial, he should have beside it the blessed memory of how that three times he had looked into the Saviour's face and declared his love.

And yet it must have been with a feeling almost of agony that he told his love—the agony of love that comes too late—the thought, I can but *tell* Thee of my love: all chance of showing it is lost.

Then came that complete restoration, not only to service but to more Christlike service. *Feed My lambs*; each sentence a fuller call, a richer ordination—*Pasture My sheep*. *Feed My dear sheep*, the word is little sheep—it meant those that needed special tenderness and patience. It is as if the Master said, 'You thought yourself no more fitted to be a fisher of men—but all that bitter experience has fitted you to be the trusted shepherd of the Lord's flock.' It was love's perfect trust that made him supremely trustworthy, and more than that, it was the perfect love that gave him the perfect fitness for the service.

But yet remains the very crown and climax of this love.

We can think that Jesus looked at Peter as if to ask, 'Well, Simon, art thou not satisfied?' 'Oh, Master, do not ask me that. I bless Thee. I praise Thee. I adore Thee—but *satisfied*—no, that alas, can never be.'

'What then should satisfy thee, Simon?'

'Oh, if I could go back to that most dreadful hour and when they come to bind Thee I could but say—Take me and bind me with my Lord! If when Thou didst go forth with the cross upon Thy shoulder, I could bid them bring yet another cross for me to march beside my Lord! If, as Thou wert crucified, I might bid them take me and nail my hands and feet that I might be crucified with my Lord! That and that only should satisfy me.'

'Simon,' said the Lord Jesus, 'even so shall it be. As I was crucified, so for My sake shalt thou too be crucified.'

V.

THE STORY OF THE BORROWED LOAVES

Luke xi. 5-8.

IT is a singular story; quaint and not without its humour. The disciples have come, saying, 'Lord, teach us to pray as John also taught his disciples.'

One would like to know what the stern and fiery Baptist taught his disciples. It would be interesting to set those petitions beside the beauty and sweet simplicity of the Lord's Prayer. What a heritage it has become to the world. In almost every language little children have learned to utter it at the mother's knee; the expression at once of our deepest need and loftiest longing, and the pledge of Heaven's help.

The Midnight Knocking.

Then comes the story of the friend at midnight.

We must give it the Eastern setting. Under the still stars the village is asleep, when there comes this belated traveller who has gone out of his way, as it is in the margin. After wandering in the darkness, he finds himself at the door of his friend. The good man of the house hastens to greet him, and the rest of the family rise to wait on him. But, alas, there is no bread in the house, and they cannot suffer him to lie down without refreshment, spent and weary as he is.

We must remember that hospitality, sacred everywhere in the East, was of peculiar force amongst the Jews. The example of their father Abraham, when he entertained angels unawares, and the great reward that followed it, pledged every Jew to hospitality. Hasting forth, the good man stands at the neighbour's door and knocks and knocks again until there comes a drowsy reply. 'Who is there? What is it?' 'Look here, dear friend (such is the word). A friend of mine has come to see me and I haven't any bread in the house. Lend me three loaves, do.'

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‘No, indeed,’ says he within, snug and warm in his bed, resenting naturally enough such a disturbance. ‘The house is shut up and I am in bed with my children.’

But he at the door knocks and knocks again loudly. Still no answer. Knock, knock, knock! ‘I am not going away until I get it—I really cannot.’

Then he within says to himself, ‘I shall have no peace, that is certain, until I give him the loaves.’ And so what he would not do for friendship he does because of the man’s *impudence*—that is the word. So he gropes in the dark and thrusts the loaves out at the door, and says, ‘Here, take them, and be gone. For pity’s sake, let me be quiet.’

Such is the story that illustrates the three stages, asking, seeking, knocking. So, saith the Lord Jesus, ‘Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.’

The Instinct of Prayer.

In turning to the contrast which the Lord Jesus proceeds to give, it is not needful to think hardly of the man in bed as if he were a surly, selfish creature. It certainly is a thing that does not make a man very amiable, to be roused from your first sleep, to go groping about in the dark to find some bread for a stranger who has come at such an untimely hour. The contrast need not be heightened by painting him too darkly.

The first thing for us to think of is *the instinct of prayer*.

A man finds himself with a want, urgent and pressing. He feels at once that the claim of a common humanity warrants such an intrusion upon his neighbour at such an hour. He feels that he would do as much for any one, and with all confidence he makes his way and boldly urges his request. Compared with his need he feels that this disturbance is but a little thing, and he knocks and knocks boldly till he gets what he wants.

Let us think of it solemnly, earnestly. Within us are deep needs, soul hunger and chill fears; wants and longings that outpass all others in their urgency. We stand like the traveller

in the gloom of midnight *out of the way*, beset with mystery, knowing not whence we came or whither we go. Behind us a past, lived yet living, and before us 'though we cannot see we guess and fear.' What then? Are the commonest wants to be met for the asking?—nay, many of them without any asking at all! The breath of my life, the sunshine of heaven, are they to be had so freely, yet for these deeper, sorer needs is there no help, no ministry? Do the mother's arms enfold her little one with tenderness; does a father find it a joy to toil for his children; does a man count it a simple, natural thing to help his friend—and then are we to pass burdened with greater wants into a realm where we are utterly forsaken? Is there no eye to look on us in pity, no voice that greets us; no love that bends over us; no great abundance that can satisfy us? Everything within us, everything about us, declares that there must be. It is the demand of our nature. Blessed be God, there is. *I say unto you*—it is pledged by such authority as none else ever had—I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given, for *every one*, every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Could His love devise any simpler way of telling of its fullness, its readiness to relieve and satisfy our need? Take hold boldly of that *every one*—it means you and me. There waits for us a deep, full, satisfaction—a love that no past can undo; that no future can lessen; a perfect deliverance; a perfect blessedness that is ours for the asking.

My very nature compels me to pray. Is the ground at my feet to yield its fruit; are the heavens above to send its showers; are the creatures about me to minister to my need; are there those who bring the joys of friendship, of love, of service—and then is there nothing more? Is the soul within me to be left bereaved of breath, of light, of food? When ye pray, say, *Our Father who art in heaven*. His very name is the pledge that all within me shall be satisfied for the asking.

Bread Enough, and to Spare.

As we go in our thought of our Lord's words the comparison

is lost—it becomes a contrast—‘ Which of you have a friend? ’ Friendship may be a doubtful thing when we are in want or difficulty. A man in his bed, a man with family to care for, may need the loaves for his children. But for us there wait the words—How much more shall your Heavenly Father give. We think no longer of the man in the dead of night knocking at a closed door, and rousing a sleeping neighbour. Another picture fills our vision. It is of one who has gone out of his way, wandering in want, and who said—‘ In my father’s house is bread enough and to spare—I will arise and go to my father.’ There is even no asking, no knocking at the door. When he was yet a great way off his father saw him and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him. Before he has time to ask anything the father said, Bring forth the best robe. No borrowing is there here of the begrudged bread. Bring hither the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry—my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. How much more shall your Father, which is in heaven, give to them that ask Him.

We become impatient of dwelling on the contrast thus, bit by bit. It is a great whole. What becomes now of the man asleep, who must be awakened and go groping in the dark to find three loaves, and that not as a gift but a loan. *How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give.* Here is no unready welcome. He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep. Here is no lack, there is bread enough and to spare. Your Father—which is in heaven—dwell upon the words—constant in His tender watchfulness, incessant in His care, a storehouse filled with all manner of good things, and ours for the asking. His only reproof is that we come so seldom and ask so little. ‘ Ask and receive,’ saith He, ‘ that your joy may be full.’

As we go on every word seems to open up a new beauty, a fuller blessedness. The thought of a neighbour asking another for bread gives place to the Father who saith to his son, All that I have is thine. ‘ What man of you,’ if his son ask bread will he give him a stone: or, for a fish shall he give him a serpent; or for an egg shall he give him a scorpion? If ye,

being evil have the love and the knowledge to give your children good things how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven? It is what seems naturally to flow from the words, yet a sequence which is lacking, unless we dwell upon it as if it overflowed in its fullness. If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven *know* how to give good gifts—no. With us knowledge of good gifts is not always power to give. Often does the sad heart well-night break with longing that it cannot bring the gift that is so needed. But here is no such limit. How much more shall your Father which is in Heaven *give*—it is assured, waiting for the asking.

How Much More?

Again we turn to see the break in this comparison and contrast that the Lord Jesus has given us. We take the words—If ye being evil know how to give your children good things, how much shall your Father which is in heaven give good things—naturally we should read it to His children. That is not the word. Then should some shrink, saying—‘I am not worthy to be called His son.’ Look at the compass of it. How much more shall He give to them that ask Him? It is pledged to every one that asketh.

And yet once more. We should read it, If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much shall your Heavenly Father give *good things* to them that ask Him? But it is not that; it is infinitely more. How much more shall your Heavenly Father give *His Holy Spirit* to them that ask Him? All that God can give us is in that supreme gift of His Holy Spirit.

Let us think earnestly what most do we need. ‘Ah,’ says one, ‘I want to see and know the truth. All is a mystery. Perplexed by many opinions, one is tossed hither and thither as on a sea.’ Ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. The very purpose is to guide us into all truth. His it is to give the spiritual discernment that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. Then is the truth not a

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mere thought, it is a very life within us, the whole life knit into a unity of truth. Our Heavenly Father who knows how most perfectly to meet our needs pledges to us this most blessed gift for the asking. Make it a daily prayer. O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit even as Thou hast promised.

‘Ah,’ sighs another, ‘I need repentance. I need the sense of sin, and of sorrow for it, and the resolute effort to forsake it, the strength to overcome.’ This too is the work of the Holy Spirit. He shall convince the world of sin. Ask boldly for the gift that is pledged for the asking—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another saith, ‘I would I could find the clear sense of my acceptance of God. I long to know the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, to look to God with confidence as my Father, to carry ever the assurance that I am His and that He is mine.’ This too is the purpose of the Holy Spirit’s coming, to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, to make it an experience, a life. He is the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. So are all gifts summed up in this great gift that is ours for the asking.

The contrast becomes yet more complete. Linger over the sight of it. Think again of the good man of the house knocking at the door, knocking and entreating him within for the loan of a loaf. Then set beside it another picture. The Lord Himself comes in the silence and the gloom. He who brings all the gifts stands and knocks. He entreats, ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him and he with Me.’

There yet remains that which completes and perfects the gifts of God in His Holy Spirit. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Do not put the full stop there. *But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.* This is the great purpose for which the Spirit of God is given to fulfil for us. *That we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

Think of Adam as God had created him in Paradise. He lay

amidst its beauty and the gladness and glory of it all, the finished man, the eye, the ear, the brain, the heart, yet it was all as nothing. His eye could not see it; nor could he hear the music of it; nor did it enter into his heart to perceive the Paradise that was his and yet not his. What is lacking? *God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and he became a living soul.* Then Adam stood and looked upon it all—the great stretch of the heavens, the endless variety of charm, the glow of all its beauty; he heard the music of its song, and every sense was gratified and every want was satisfied. So is it that we are deaf, blind, unresponsive to His love until the gift of the Holy Spirit is ours that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.

This is the truth so pitiable, that we are so rich and yet so poor; such gifts our own, yet all unrealized. It is the story over again of the millionaire who imagined himself a pauper and lived on half-a-crown a week and a loaf of bread. We are pauper millionaires. The unsearchable riches of Christ are ours did we but know it.

Once in the history of Israel we read how that the city was in a terrible state of starvation. The King of Syria had besieged it, and the people were reduced to a condition of utter misery. And at the gate of the city sat four poor lepers in their hunger, and to whom everything seemed hopeless. 'If we enter into the city,' they said, 'the famine is in the city and we shall die there; and if we sit here we die also. Let us fall into the hands of the Syrians; if they save us alive we shall live; and if they kill us we shall but die.' So with wasted frame and misery of hunger they rose up in the twilight and crept to the camp of the enemy. But no watchman stayed them; no sentinel challenged them. The enemy had fled, and all their treasure was the property of these poor lepers. Here was dainty meat and royal wine for them on the king's own table. Here were gold and silver vessels, and costly robes were strewn along the paths. And when these poor men had freely helped themselves they bethought them of the starving city and hurried back to tell

them of all that was theirs, waiting only for them to come forth and take freely all that had befallen them.

It is the faint picture of that *much more* of the Heavenly Father's gifts, yet unknown to us. How much more shall our Father which is in Heaven give us His Holy Spirit that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Yet another side is there which it is a terrible thing to overlook, and yet which is perhaps seldom thought of. The Holy Spirit is given not only that we may know what we have in the Lord, but also that we may know *what He has in us*.

St. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, You are become Christ's heritage, His estate. And I cease not to pray for you that by the Holy Spirit you may see the unsearchable riches in this estate; how much He has in them.

There are proposals to turn to account the uncultivated lands: and moors are to be made into forests; and stretches of water to be drained for cornfields. Think if only we could turn to account the uncultivated estates of Christ. Think of the ground where the thorns choke the seed. They that hear the word and yet it never bears fruit—the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the seed and it becometh unfruitful.

The prayer of St. Paul may well become our own. O God, give me Thy Holy Spirit that I may see what I have got in Thee and what Thou hast got in me. Amen.

VI.

A SUMMER SONG

ALL nature is sacramental if we have but the tuned heart and the anointed eye to greet it. The works of God's creation, as the Blessed Master taught us, are pictures and parables of the mysteries of grace. God's world is also God's word. So let us go forth to rejoice in its beauty and to join in its song.

If the fullness of the summer can be put into words there are none that could utter it more perfectly than those of our Lord—'I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.' That text is written everywhere, in hedgerow and garden, in field and forest. The softened winds whisper it. The birds make it their song. It is the message of the sunshine: I am come to bring the overflowing life.

Think of all about us as it was but a little time ago—the stretch of empty fields and leafless trees and rotting stalks. Can these things live? we might have asked. Can the hedgerows and gardens be decked with flowers and the fields be made beautiful with the promise of harvest? Can the birds find heart again to build their nests and sing their songs? We are ready to say with him of old—If God would make windows in Heaven then might this thing be.

So, the windows of Heaven have been opened and its joys have come down to the earth. There is a new song—'the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.'

Let us take it and claim it as our own in greater fullness, and richer beauty—'I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.'

The Parable of the Seed.

The season is rich in parables. Let us listen to the parable of the Seed. The South Wind came to the Seed in its winter slumber and said, 'Wake up, little one, come, wake up. Don't you know that you are not meant to be a seed for ever?'

'Wake up, indeed!' said the Seed drowsily. 'What am I meant to be but a seed for ever?'

'You are meant,' said the South Wind, 'to burst through your husks, to thrust roots into the ground, and to push up a stem; to unfold in beauty and to bless the earth.'

Now, if among the seeds there can be found a little faith, we think we hear it answer: 'It really is cruel to mock me with such fine promises. I know, at any rate, what I am, a hard, shapeless thing. It would take a miracle to make a flower of me—and the age of miracles is past. No, no, South Wind, you may just let me be as I am, a seed for ever and ever.'

'But that is the very miracle that I have come to work,' said the South Wind.

'But look at my circumstances,' murmured the Seed. 'Here am I down in the dark earth. Flowers are up in the light, with the sun to shine on them and the dew to refresh them. I would hold up my head if I could, but what if you haven't a head to hold up: and with a lump of earth to keep you down.'

'Now, Seed, are you willing to take what is given you?'

'Well, yes, I can do that.'

'Then you need nothing more.'

And there came the sun to shine for it. The drops fell from heaven to refresh it. The very earth said, 'I am yours, for your unfolding,' and they all sang together, 'We have come that you may have life, and that you may have it more abundantly.'

Life More Abundant.

There is everywhere about us the energy and power that can overcome the winter and bring the beauty and song of the summer. What is it? What is the opening of spring? What lies away at the back and source of the summer?

All life is a mystery, but this much the masters of science teach

us—that only life begets life. To us the beauty and blessedness of summer can find but one explanation—*Thou renewest the face of the earth.*

Think of the energy, the utterly amazing and immeasurable energy that is everywhere, pouring itself forth in the heat of the sun, going down to the roots, putting force into the seed so that it finds its way into the light, unfolding leaf and flower. What forces are at work in every tree, carrying the sap and distributing it to every bud. Think of the need of all the young life about us, adapting itself to every condition.

Then as we have thought of the vastness and wonder of it all let us turn and listen to the lowly peasant of Nazareth as He saith—*I am come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.* No other that ever lived had dared to make such an utterance. The Lord Jesus is come not only to tell us the meaning of life and its purpose: not only to teach us a new method of life. He is come to be within us every one a new energy: a force that can uplift and transform and beautify us. That is the great purpose for which He saith He is come—to give us the strength and gladness and glory of the life of God. This is the meaning of His gospel—that life is not a dream in our better moments, mocked by a round of failures; it is not a vain struggle against hindrances, cruel in their strength; it is not a far off hope that somewhere we shall be what we would. He is come to be in us a quickening and transforming force, such as that which turns a dead seed to flower and fruit. All that, and yet so much more. If God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you. O ye of little faith, that *much more* is infinite.

Think again of the energy that expends itself in the quickening and fulfilling of the life about us. But for us is an energy infinitely greater, incessant with no slackening of the autumn, no checking of the winter time. *All things*—let us try to grasp something of it—*all things.* The light we see by, the air we breathe, the very beat of the heart and throb of brain—*all*

things—the little round of daily life, the business, the affairs of the nation, commerce, politics, all things. *All things work together*—a unity of purpose runs through all the things. The vast machinery of God is set to one end and purpose.

We have felt the beauty of the summer in fruit and flower. But what is all we see compared with the beauty that waits for us—that *much more* with which we are to be clothed? All things work together that *we be conformed to the image of His Son*. All things are at work for our uplifting and transforming into nothing less than the likeness of Him who is the altogether lovely. If God so clothe the grass of the field how much more shall He clothe even us of little faith! Ours is nothing less than the beauty of the Lord our God.

So let the soul sing its summer song.

The Ear of Corn.

Like the blessed Master who without a parable spake not to the people, I would put forth yet another parable of the seed.

I held in my hand an ear of corn.

‘Come,’ said I, ‘little Chrysostom, come, tell us all about yourself.’

‘What a long word! What does it mean?’

‘Well, it is the name of a great preacher, and it means the golden-mouthed, like you, you know.’

‘Am I a preacher, then?’

‘Yes, indeed you are.’

‘How can I ever preach?’

‘By telling all about yourself. I want you to begin your story.’

‘Well, once upon a time, do you know, I was a tiny, tiny little seed. I wasn’t a meal for a mouse. And I had a dream, a lovely dream. I dreamt that I helped the toiler to toil and the singer to sing, and the preacher to preach, and I sent the little children skipping to school. And then I woke up, and it was all a dream, a silly dream for a tiny grain like me.’

‘Well, what happened next?’

‘One day the sower came on his way, and he said, “Little one, may I have thee?”’

'Please sir,' I said, 'I am not worth your having.'

'“You are, indeed,” said he.

'What will you do with me?'

'“I will bring you to beauty, and bring you to worth, and your dream shall all come true.”

'But look at me, a little hard, dead seed.'

'“All the golden harvests that ever waved were once tiny little hard seeds like you.”

'So I gave myself to the sower—and that was the beginning of it all, you know.'

'Yes,' said I. 'Yes, he that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; that always is the beginning of it all. Well, what happened next?'

'Why, I was down in the dark earth, in prison, and all sorts of horrid things were creeping about me. I expected to be in the sunshine with a long stem and a golden head. There seemed no hope for me now. Then the sower came on his way. “Little one,” said he, “don't be afraid. All the golden harvests that ever waved were once down there in the dark like you.”

'Well, then the next thing was that I managed to get out of the ground, and I wasn't golden corn at all. I was only green, green grass. “There,” I said, “I knew it was no good my trying. Corn is golden, and I am green.” And there were such lots of troubles then. I heard a man say that I could not live without the sun, and he said the sun was millions of miles away, and I said to myself how was I going to get up there every time I wanted a sun ray! And another said I must have rain, and the clouds were ever so high up, and I wondered if I should want a neck so long whenever I was thirsty. But the sower said, “Little one, it is all right. If you cannot get up to the sun it can come down to you.” And it did—sent a little ray right down into my heart. And a cloud stood over me and dropped the drop in my mouth. So you see I have managed to get so far, and the sower says I shall manage all the rest of the way.'

Ah, soul, our foolish fears and fancies may end. He who has

brought us so far on the way will bring us all the rest of the way. So sings the summer song.

The Multiplying Life.

Let us give earnest heed to yet another message of the summer. The one persistent and enduring life is in the seed; the leaf fades, the flower withers, only the seed lives. The summer will end and the harvest pass, but the sower will go forth with the seed of the last harvest that will give him another.

The first thing God made in the world was seed. Then when the grass was grown, and the fruit hung on the trees, there came the creatures that found in it their food. The trees and flowers of Paradise are dead long ages ago; yet they are with us to-day because of the seed.

'There shall be a handful of corn in the earth,' sang the psalmist—a scanty supply for a hungry world, 'on the top of the mountains,' a poor place that for corn, 'the valleys shall be covered over with corn.' But there is life in it—the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.'

That handful of corn is the Babe of Bethlehem—the house of bread, away in the hill country of Judea. 'The earth shall be filled with His glory.'

The seed is the life that goes on ever multiplying.

A gentleman one day was telling me of his son, a young man who was doing well. 'He was only a lad,' said my friend, 'when I happened to be with him in the garden and picked a broad bean, and I flicked him one of them.'

'Give me that, father,' he asked as he caught it. 'Of course,' said I, 'that is not much to give.'

'Will you give me all that goes with it?'

'Of course,' I said again, not thinking of what he meant.

He said no more, but planted the bean and got a good supply the next year. Then he planted quite a long patch, unknown to me. It was perhaps four years after that he came and said, 'Do you remember giving me a bean once, father?'

'Well,' I said, 'Yes, I think I do. Why?'

'You said you would give me all that went with it. So next

year I shall want all the garden, and some day I shall want half the parish.'

'Ah, you have made a good bargain,' I said, 'and I must keep my promise. I will put fifty pounds in the bank to your credit to settle the matter.'

Seed—there was life in it.

Long years ago I brought home one day a packet of flower seeds. 'What are they?' said my little daughter. 'Flowers,' I said. 'No, they are not flowers,' said she. 'Well, we will wait and see.' Forth we went and put the seeds in the ground, and later came the buds, and then a blaze of colour. 'Did they really come out of those little black things? However did they come?' 'Ah,' said I, 'if I knew that I should indeed be a clever man.' I had gone back to my work and the little one came to whisper a great secret. 'There are going to be birds—flying, singing, everywhere—you come with me.'

Away we went together. 'Do you see that stick? Well, I *planted a feather*.' But the birds never came and I found it a difficult matter to explain why they did not come.

Here is that which we should very solemnly consider. We have received the good seed that through us it may pass on increased, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, a hundred-fold. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

VII.

BROKEN HEARTS AND STARS

'He healeth the broken in heart. . . . He telleth the number of the stars.'—Ps. cxlvii. 3, 4.

WHERE can we find a conception of God more beautiful? God's greatness and goodness: His power and pity; omnipotence and tenderness. He healeth the broken in heart. . . . He telleth the number of the stars. It is divine, and only divine.

Stars and broken hearts—how far apart are they. Here is height and depth. We look up into the heavens and think of the vastness of space, a million worlds lie scattered within its immensity. Here all is majestic, unvarying in its march and order, upheld by an Almighty power. How great the contrast as we turn to our foolish, fickle heart with its ills, its feebleness, its fear. We think of the little round we fill, the little space of time, mere specks of dust, lightly lifted, lightly laid. 'When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him?'

The first great truth for us is this: that in all the universe the most sacred thing is a sad heart. Do you remember the picture of 'The Doctor'? Do you see as he sits bending over the sick child, all his knowledge, all his experience, all his skill, are drawn out to the fullest. Everything else is forgotten; all his heart and soul are set upon the child. God is much more at home with the sad heart than with the stars. Our Father,—amidst those vast distances and glories, He can find no place for His pity, no response to His love, nothing that He can bend over to heal and bless.

It may well seem to us as if the stars were the true sphere for God. It is the sphere of perfect law—an order unvarying and

sublime. An utter contrast this to the lawlessness of the heart, rebellious, at strife with itself and sometimes at strife with all else. But the heart is the sphere of love. The heart is the realm of pity. What God does is seen amongst the stars, but only the heart can know what God is. His glory is writ large across the heavens, but that which is much more than His glory—His tenderness, His pity, His patience, His gracious help—He can only reveal to the heart that is in need.

'He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.' Do not think that it is only spiritual. We are apt to think that God has nothing to do with us except our souls, and knows nothing about us but our sins. There are no such limits in His love. Yet sorrow is sacred, and I will not probe the causes of this complaint. Analysis may be vivisection. But let me be so plain and definite that every heart may be bold to take these words for its own. Bereavement may have brought it. Sickness may have caused it. Loss and misfortune may have wrought it. Or it may be that the thought of God's holiness and our sin or folly have filled the soul with bitterness. We would not make light of sin, yet much less would we limit His love. Remember how they are linked together in that great psalm of praise—'Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases.' '*He bindeth up their wounds*' is meant for every wounded heart. 'Father, I have sinned against Thee,' cried the prodigal bitterly. But that could not stay the father's step or lessen the joy of his welcome.

The Great Healer.

He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. 'He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth.' What are they but those whom others shun and despise? It is a great word that Job speaks: 'He despiseth not any, for that He is great in heart.' That is much; but there is infinitely more. See how He goes forth to His work. 'Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praises unto our God. And praise is comely.' On what errand does He go forth in majesty with such array, as if the music of heaven and earth must proclaim His coming? He goes to gather

together the outcasts and to heal the broken in heart. His delight it is to do this work, His exceeding joy, for which He would have sweet songs. The beauty of the Lord must greet the outcast, and the sad soul must feel made much of and as dear as earth's great ones.

The Lord Jesus always went to those who sent for Him, yet what the Roman centurion said we well might say—'Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof: neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee.' But there was one of whom He went in search. It is in the story of the blind man whom Jesus had healed and who spake up boldly before the angry Pharisees declaring if Jesus were not of God He could do nothing. And they in their haughtiness said, 'Dost *thou* teach *us*! and they cast him out.' 'Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped Him.' To the outcast He gave the true second-sight; the eyes of his understanding being enlightened.

These Pharisees brought again yet another outcast demanding that she be stoned. She shrank, frightened and trembling, at His feet, and He bent over her and wrote upon the ground as if some promise that only her downcast eyes could read. Then, lifting Himself, He turned to her accusers, 'Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.' And they went away and left Him alone. And He healed her broken heart with His gracious forgiveness. *He healeth the broken in heart.*

Here is a complaint for which no provision is made elsewhere. All sorts of complaints are named in the lists of those treated in our hospitals, but there is no entry of the broken in heart. Let us thank God for the provision that is made amongst us for the sick. The great hospitals stand in their stateliness—the palaces, not of pleasure, not of wealth, but of benevolence and healing. And the several diseases have their separate hospitals and specialists to deal with them. Varied medicines, surgical appliances—but what have they for the broken in heart? Where

is their physician, and where the medicine that ministers to them?

I have come sometimes upon the scene of an accident in the street. The crowd gathers instantly, each eager to help. Policemen are ready to carry the sufferer to the hospital. There he is tenderly borne to the bed, and doctors and nurses wait with skilful ministry. But as the crowd has passed away I have seen those whose need was all unheeded. Grief has filled the face, despair has looked forth from their eyes. Christ's hospital is the only hospital for the stricken soul, the sad heart. *He healeth the broken in heart.*

Seeking the Hidden Broken Hearts.

He seeks the broken hearted, for it hides itself away. It finds some pitiful solace in solitude. How plaintively does Cowper tell of his grief :

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since. With many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was changed when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
Then was I found of One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed, and bade me live.

So is it that He who healeth the broken heart seeks for them in their loneliness. How beautiful and how blessed is the picture He has given us of Himself as the Good Shepherd—He leaveth the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goeth after that which is lost until He find it. And when He hath found it He layeth it on His shoulders with rejoicing. And when He cometh home He calleth together His neighbours and friends saying unto them, Rejoice with Me for I have found My sheep that was lost. *He gathereth together the outcasts.*

The poor must go to the hospital and wait for the physician. To the honour of this noblest profession be it that none have more care than the poorest. They must wait for him, that is all.

When he goes forth in his carriage it is to see his private patients. It is good to think that with the Good Physician we are all *His private patients*. When He comes to the broken heart it is not as something aside, as if He stooped from the heavens. It is rather as if this were His first and highest work; and then He stooped to the stars. First He must bind their wounds; then He telleth the number of the stars. To heal is the joyous work in which He delights.

'He healeth.' What a blessed decidedness and definiteness there is in the words. Of other physicians we say 'he treats' such cases. But our Lord healeth them. When the centurion sent to Christ about the sick servant the answer was prompt and immediate—'I will come and heal him.' Others must be content to say, 'I will come and see him.' He *healeth* the broken in heart.

Our doctors, skilful as they may be, have sorrowfully to acknowledge their limits. 'You see your sickness is of such long standing that it has become chronic. I may give you some relief, but cure is impossible.' The Great Physician, our Lord, has no chronic cases. And in Christ's hospital there is no ward for incurables. 'You see your constitution has been undermined, and you have no natural stamina to help you.' But this Physician giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. 'You see, if you could take a journey across the seas, or rest awhile in a sunny climate, there would be a chance for you.' Of this Physician blessed is it to know that He Himself is the Son of Righteousness who cometh with His healing. No journey is needful to find Him. Time fails to tell of all His qualifications, but there is one on which we may linger. He healed the leper, the fevered, the palsied, the blind, the deaf, the lame. By all tender sympathy He was one with them. Yet we do not know that He Himself ever suffered from any of these ailments. But with the outcast and the broken hearted the Lord of heaven is one. He was despised and rejected of men, and of Him it is written, 'Thy reproach, O God, has broken My heart.'

A Doctor's Devotion.

What more can we ask or desire than this—our gracious and Almighty Lord ever at hand to make us whole? There is an exquisite story of Ian Maclaren's, where in a Scotch cottage the crofter's wife is dying. The husband follows the doctor into the yard as he mounts his horse, and hears that the case is hopeless. He leans his head against the horse's mane, and stammers out his grief for his Annie, whom he loves so well. 'Can nothing be done, doctor? Ye have saved many; can ye no think of something to help her back to her man and her bairns?'

The doctor tried to speak some words of comfort to the man, and then went on his way. Afar off in the chief town was one whose skill in such cases was famous, but his charge for the journey and attendance could not be less than one hundred guineas. The doctor muttered to himself, 'To get the moon out of heaven would be as easy; yet it is hard that money will buy life, after all, and if Annie were a duchess her husband would not lose her.' Then he, poor man as he was, together with a kind-hearted neighbour, agreed to pay the fee, and telegraphed for the specialist. The floods were out, and it was a perilous drive to the house, but they reached it at last. Annie was saved, and the famous surgeon, when he heard of the devotion of the poor local doctor, tore up the cheque. Fine indeed is it as illustrating the noblest of those in the noblest of the professions.

But turn from this to think how great a thing it is that we should have to wait upon us and to minister to us the very Lord of Heaven; He that telleth the stars. He is never afar off, nor out of reach, for, lo! He is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart. Here for us is all tenderness, all power, all unfailing skill. 'He healeth the broken in heart.' And His only fee is our fuller love and gladder devotion.

For an illustration, passing wonderful, of this exceeding tenderness, let us turn to the ninety-first psalm. 'He shall give His angels charge concerning thee to keep thee in all thy ways.' We know not the mystery of their service, but let us know that

the charge is given by Him whom it is their joy to serve. But even theirs is not the service that satisfies the God of all consolation. '*I will be with him in trouble,*' saith the Most High. When trouble comes He comes. '*He shall call upon Me and I will answer him.*' He is ever within call. A sigh and He is beside us. The response is instant. *I will be with him in trouble.*

We need to bring it down from the majesty of the star-filled heaven to the homeliest simplicity. It is as when the mother sends forth her little one and bids the maid be careful of her charge. But when the face is flushed, and there is trouble the mother saith, 'I must have the little one with me to-night.' It is no sweet dream; it is the very truth. He who made a mother's love, loves us with a mother's love.

So let the soul that has been sad take down the harp from the willows. '*Why?*' is a question of wonder, of reproof. '*Why art thou cast down, oh my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.*'

VIII.

THE STORY OF THE LAME BEGGAR

'His ankle bones received strength.'—Acts iii. 6.

THIS is the second chapter in the history of the Church. The first chapter, with its rapturous outburst, leaves us wondering what shall follow. On every side such enthusiasm and splendid triumph that we expect the disciples to go forth summoning the world to submit to the conquering Lord. The whole city has been stirred, and strangers from afar are carrying back the tidings of the pentecostal power to the ends of the earth. Three thousand have been added to-day—what to-morrow?

Then suddenly we pass from the midst of this excitement to the quiet of a sunny afternoon, in which the people are going up to service in the Temple. And when we expect to read of whole cities converted and nations evangelized, we find the two great apostles bending over a crippled beggar. Surely it is a notable thing, that of the Church which is to conquer Rome and Greece and the barbarian, the second chapter should be the healing of a lame beggar. Look at it. This is precisely the Christianity of Jesus Christ—it comes to save a world, but it never loses sight of the single sufferer. It is never so busied about its great schemes that it forgets the beggar. This is the picture of the Church for all ages—its claims, its hopes, its commission concern the world, yet it bends in eager sympathy and ready help over the single sufferer. And more than that—through the individual it seeks to win the world. Yet again, it is worth while to think of this as the second chapter in the history of the Church. First is the tongue of fire—without that there is nothing. Then completing it is the brotherly grasp, and the bidding: 'In the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk!' The connexion is full of meaning. First the truth that lives, that

melts, that transforms. We have the living truth from God Himself. That which flesh and blood cannot reveal unto us but the Father which is in Heaven. We listen to the many voices apart from this, but what can they do for us? 'Here,' cries the Church, 'here is tradition. The authority of a thousand years.'

But we go hungering on our ways. 'Let the dead bury its dead.' Bones of mediaeval saints are best in the grave. 'Here,' cries the Church, 'are masterly volumes on the evidences.'

'Wearisome evidences,' say we with a yawn. 'They do not touch us; they do not move us; they do not inspire us with life.' 'Here, then,' hints the perplexed divine, 'here are new sermons.' 'Thank you,' we say politely, and perhaps sleep under them.

John Wesley was familiar with the traditions of authority. He had mastered the evidences; he had heard and had preached many sermons. But what of it all, until there came the strange warmth of his heart, that kindling fire within? Then he went forth with the tongue of fire.

That first, and then what more? 'I see,' the man says, 'I feel. I desire, but, alas, I cannot get up.' Then comes the pity that bends low down and grips the hand, and in the name of the Lord Jesus bids him rise up and walk. And he goes leaping and praising God. That completes it. We can only get into the second chapter through the first; and the first needs the second to complete it.

At the Beautiful Gate.

Let us draw near and look upon the scene. Here in the shade of the Beautiful Gate sits the man begging, whilst the many worshippers pass up and down the broad steps of the Temple. Here are stately Pharisees, and priests robed, and venerable Jews. Here are groups from the country bringing the first-born son to present him to the Lord with a pair of doves as sacrifice. Here are little children turning eyes of pity toward the lame man in the porch. Look at him, and see here *the world's need*.

All sorts of doctors have for ages been dissecting our poor humanity to find what is amiss, all agreeing that there is

something wrong, and mostly differing as to what. The text puts its finger on the mischief—the world's curse is weak ankle bones—men cannot arise and walk.

Let us talk with the man in the porch. He is intelligent enough; quite a keen observer. Above all he notices each passer by and can give you a lecture on the art of walking. He lays down the law with much emphasis, a most skilful critic. We venture to ask at length, 'And you, can you show us how it should be done?' He looks quite hurt at the question. 'My dear sir, I do not profess to walk, my ankle bones are weak.'

It is a critical world, a world with a lofty ideal, that can set other people right, but for itself it cannot get up and walk.

Those about him could not help him. Day after day, for years they had brought him here, and laid him down in the shadow of the porch. They brought him his scanty supply of food. And at even they came to fetch him home again. But none could make him whole. He could not rise up and walk.

Nor could time heal him. He was above forty years of age. Once, no doubt, the wise folks said he would get all right in time. He would grow out of it. He must wait. But through the years hope faded. There was no help for it. Never would the years bring any healing. Born a cripple, a cripple he must die.

They laid him in the porch of the Temple. About him floats the stately music of the psalms. The fragrant incense breathes its sweetness. The priests move to and fro busied with their holy duties. There he sits through all the hours of prayer; for years the place has scarcely ever been empty, Sabbath and week day, and yet he is as lame and helpless as ever. He had gone to church for forty years—and yet he could not get up and walk.

They laid him in the Gate Beautiful. Surely that will cure him—the ennobling and uplifting influence of art. Is it not one of the many remedies for our ills? Bring your lame beggar to the Gate Beautiful. Surround him with graceful curves and massive pillars, and springing arches and dainty pinnacles. Let him rest amidst such visions. Alas, he is weary of it all, he knows it so well. Ask him: 'Has it done you any good?' 'Good!'

says he, 'I have been there for years and am no better than when I came at first.' Thank God for beauty, anywhere, everywhere. It is one of God's own angels. But, alas, for the poor world, if it can find no better remedy than the Gate Beautiful.

Still in the Church Porch.

We linger over it all as the sad picture of many in our churches to-day. They are always in the church porch. They linger at the temple gate. They are regular in their attendance. They know much more than thousands who have come into the inner court, decided and faithful servants of God. They see and almost envy that which some have found, and which waits for them as freely if they would but resolutely accept it. Others whose memory is cherished beyond that of all, have done all they could by love and prayers and example. Yet they linger in the porch. There have been times, far back, when they thought some day this joy would be their own. But they have not grasped that outstretched Hand; never heeded the divine bidding.

Is it not an awful responsibility to be within reach of this blessedness and not to accept it? We are responsible not for what we are but for what God would do for us, and what He would make of us. Is it not a terrible thing to rob ourselves of the highest and fullest good that God can bestow, and to rob God and those about us of our influence and service?

We look again at the lame beggar. It was a useless life. He came to the temple porch to pick up what he could, but nobody was the better for him. Only a mouth to be fed: not a pair of hands to help; not a pair of feet to run on any glad errand. In the temple porch of old there was one only—but to-day in our temple porch, alas, how many. It was a joyless life. Here about him were the many worshippers. Happy voices rang about him. He could look toward the city and the stir of the crowds reached him. And far away on the rocky ways were the troops of pilgrims or the caravans of the merchants. Everywhere the joy of service; everywhere a gladness. And from the Temple came the chant of psalm and sounds of worship. Upon it all was the doleful note of his, 'Pity the poor cripple.' With him it was a

dire necessity, a failing for compassion, not for blame. But what of those within the temple porch of to-day whose defects are the result of a careless neglect or of a dull indifference. They who might be strong, weak. They who might be of so much use, useless. They who might be glad with the music of God within them, dumb and unresponsive. Here is a matter of deeper pity than was the lame beggar of old.

Let us turn to the healing of this man.

Toward the Temple come two worshippers, one of them we can think a man with a face that might inspire any beggar with hope, a face 'whereon perpetually did reign the summer calm of golden charity.' We do not wonder that the man should ask alms of John. The other who was with him had eyes that flashed beneath the shaggy brows, and lips parted as if in haste to speak. So did they supplement one another—John's sympathy and Peter's energy—there is a double good in good company.

And yet more is there in that word. Now Peter and John went up together into the Temple. It is but a little time since we read how even at that last supper there was a dispute amongst them as to who should be the greatest. How changed is the atmosphere when the day of Pentecost was fully come. The wrangling is hushed and forgotten—'they continued daily with one accord, and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.' There was a continual love feast.

At once Peter fastened his eyes upon the lame man. They have caught the spirit of the Master. We remember that St. Mark tells us that as Jesus was coming out of the Temple the disciples said, Master, see what manner of stones are here. But Jesus was looking elsewhere. Another sight more beautiful had caught his notice. It was a certain poor woman who came near the treasury and cast in all that she had. Judge a man by what he sees—the poet's eye for beauty, the merchant's eye for profit, the worldling's eye for pleasure, the Christian's eye for pity and for service.

Peter fastening his eyes upon the man with John said, 'Look

on us. And he gave heed unto them expecting to receive something of them.' They took his eyes off himself. He looked up expecting money. If he had thought for a moment that they were thinking of his weak ankles would he not instantly have looked down with a sigh and begun to finger the wasted bones. He would have shaken his head quite positively and said, 'No, it is no good, sirs. I was born with this defect and for forty years I have been helpless. I have tried everything already, bandage, blister, poultice and am nothing the better but rather the worse.' What a comfort it is to many people to dwell upon their symptoms and the history of their ills.

Look on us, rang out the bidding of Peter. He did not ask the man how old he was, how long he had suffered, how he had come by his ill. He would have the man forget himself and his difficulties in a glad expectation and hope. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' said David. It was not only to see what was there but to forget what was here—to forget his want, to lose sight of himself and to see only the help that was coming from the Lord. What a mercy if those who think of their need would look up, expecting to receive something. It is a miserable conceit that is for ever prating of its difficulties. If there is an Almighty helper is it not an impertinence to make so much of oneself? That look up is the beginning of the healing with us as with him of old.

Peter said to the man, who looked up eagerly expecting an alms—'Silver and gold have I none.'

What a mercy. If human nature was as human nature is, they would have given the man a threepenny bit and gone their way counting they had done all they could. Money is our remedy for the ills of humanity. Thank God for some ills it is a remedy. Gold and silver may be turned to such high uses that the very angels of God might almost wish they had so great a power for good. But the Christianity of Jesus Christ always made little of money. Every great religious movement has been upward from the manger to the throne; and generally the richer it has got the poorer it has got, until giving money has been counted

the whole duty of man. The rich man has been more to the Church than the good man. There was once amongst men One who had the control of all wealth, who pitied the poor and suffering as none else ever pitied them, yet was He of all men the poorest, and the one remedy He never used for the world's want was money. When the increase of the Church was most rapid, and thousands were counted as we count ones, those who were its foremost evangelists declared—Silver and gold have we none. John Wesley's supreme dread for Methodism was its becoming rich.

Then came the further words. 'Such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up.'

Note the attitude. Apostolic precedent counts for much—the shape of a robe, the colour of a ribbon, the posture of a bishop—think of Peter and John caring for these things. But here is an apostolic precedent that we may well strive to imitate. Peter stood with his left hand, the hand of his love, in the hand of the Lord, and his right hand in the hand of the beggar. Then is the contact complete. Through that man the love and power of the Almighty Saviour can flow without let or hindrance. The brotherly hand would set many a poor fellow on his feet. A great heart grip is a mighty power, one might almost say the mightiest human power in the Church. But all else found its completion in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The work was done. Immediately his ankle bones received strength, up leapt the man and went with Peter and John through the gathering crowd leaping in his new found strength and praising God.

Now was there a great excitement—all the people knew him well—the lame beggar who for forty years had sat at the Gate Beautiful. The news spread from one to another and the crowd became greater every moment until it was a surging host, 'greatly wondering.'

Then the lame beggar became a text for a sermon from Peter. 'Why marvel at this?' he cried. 'He whom ye killed, the

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Prince of Life, Him hath God raised from the dead. And He, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong. Repent ye, therefore, that your sins may be forgiven.'

Then came the indignant authorities, the priests and the ruler of the temple, and the Sadducees, and Peter and John were put into prison.

But that day we read 'many of them that heard the word believed, and the number of men was above five thousand.'

Who can tell where one conversion will end?

IX.

A GREATER THAN SOLOMON

‘The Queen of the South shall rise up in judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here.’—Matt. xii. 42.

HOW amazed would be the multitude and even the disciples and yet more the haughty Pharisees and Sadducees at such a saying—a greater than Solomon!

To them Solomon was of kings the most splendid; of men the wisest. His glory had become, in Christ’s day, the subject of boundless exaggeration. He was thought of as the prince of magicians, skilled in all the secret knowledge of nature, able to summon demons at his will, and to cure diseases with mysterious spells.

Think if some minister of to-day should stand in the pulpit and declare, ‘A greater than Solomon is here.’ We should rather be amused at his folly, than think of its audacity.

Yet to many of those who heard it from Christ’s lips it must have seemed even more amazing. The minister stands at least in orthodox dress, and here was one in the rough dress of a working man. A minister represents a certain recognition of his ability by some authority; but here was one who had never studied in their schools or satisfied their requirements for the office of teacher or preacher.

Greater than Solomon! And they turned to one another and said, ‘Is not this the carpenter?’ With a few Galilean fishermen as His followers He of Nazareth, not even of Jerusalem, but of a remote fishing village, stood and declared, ‘A greater than Solomon is here.’

To us, looking at that completed life, how perfectly natural is this blending of majesty that cannot be concealed with a

lowliness that is never hidden. At once the Son of God and the Son of man, no humiliation lessens the divinity: and in His loftiest claims He is still the meek and lowly Saviour.

When He is born we hear the Heavenly Host proclaiming, 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward men'; yet this is the sign, 'Ye shall find the young child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.' A star leads on the wise men, who bring their gold and myrrh and frankincense; yet the same night Joseph must arise and take the young child, and His mother, for that Herod seeks to slay Him. He goes forth homeless and hungry, yet the angels of God come and minister to Him.

He hangs, the despised and rejected of men amidst all shame and anguish; yet the heaven is darkened, the earth quakes, the veil is rent, and all nature declares, 'Truly this is the Son of God.' He is laid in the tomb, and the grave is sealed and guarded by Roman soldiers; yet the bonds of death are broken, and the angels proclaim, 'He is not here, He is risen.'

So it is that these words were as natural as they were true. 'Behold, a greater than Solomon is here!'

Yet it would seem to them that no greater contrast could be than that between the lowly Nazarene and the splendid King of Israel, inheriting all the triumphs of his father David; coming to the throne when the nation had reached its utmost power and prosperity; himself dowered with gifts of wisdom, and with a fame for judgement that was spreading throughout the world; with a wealth that seems impossible for us to calculate. Great indeed was Solomon.

And this lowly Nazarene claims to be greater than Solomon.

The real greatness of Solomon does not lie on the surface. He achieved for Israel something of what was done for Britain in Queen Elizabeth's time, when its bold adventurers went forth to claim the wealth of the new world.

It is only by looking at the map of Palestine that we can follow it. No nation was ever so shut in as that of which he had

become king. 'A vineyard walled about,' as Isaiah said. Jerusalem, a capital, without a river. The river makes the city, as the Thames makes London, and the river mouth is an opening for the traffic that it brings. The coast of Palestine is unbroken as no other for gulf or harbour. Eastward lay the deep depression of the Jordan Valley, thirteen hundred feet below the sea-level. Southward was the great and terrible desert. Northward was the range of Hermon, reaching its snowy peaks twice as high as any mountain of ours. The traffic of the Mediterranean was in the hands of Tyre and Sidon, whose ships, with their daring seamen, went to what was then the end of the world, reaching our shores and exchanging their Tyrian products for our western tin. Now with a magnificent enterprise Solomon sent across the desert in the south. The great enterprise is summed up in but few words to tell so great an undertaking: 1 Kings ix. 26—'And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber on the shore of the Red Sea in the land of Edom.' Thus was opened to him all the wealth of the Indian Ocean. Gold and ivory from Africa: all manner of precious stones and rich tapestry from India. The rare trees for his garden and the apes and peacocks of which we read. Contact with the world and its commerce stirred the nation and brought new aims and ambitions and enormous wealth to indulge it. Herein lay the greatness of Solomon—although an ambition that overleaped itself and wrought the later miseries of Israel, we cannot but admire such enterprise and achievement.

We must think how the effect of this sudden access of wealth and splendour was heightened by the simplicity of the court life up to this time. Saul lived in rustic plainness. David was more of a soldier than a courtier.

Let us go forth and see this great Solomon in his glory. The Jewish writers linger proudly over the accounts of it. Afar off amidst music of the singers and musicians comes the King. The incense rises as a cloud to herald the royal presence. There gleam the weapons of the body-guard, of whom the most valiant are chosen. Drawn by horses, imported at great cost from Egypt, is the chariot built of cedar, with pillars of silver and

floor of pure gold, hung with tapestries and set with cushions of purple. Within sits the King in his robes of splendour. Behind him on their war horses ride the archers, clad in purple; and yet behind them the young lords chosen for their stature, their long black hair, powdered with gold, glistening in the sun.

We turn from it thinking only who is the better for it all. Measure greatness by the extent to which it can be shared. Many a simple labourer must have gone back to his lowly home and round of toil feeling that all this made life seem duller, the home poorer, the work drearier for all that pomp and display. What the better are they for it all? And worse than this came with the passing days.

The words of Samuel have found a terrible fulfilment. 'He shall take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots and his horsemen and some shall run before his chariots.' Read 1 Sam. viii. 10-18.

We now turn to see a greater than Solomon. Think how He might have appeared to those about Him; how once the disciples saw Him, His face shining as the sun, His eyes as flames of fire, His robes all white and glistening. The angels who sang at His coming would have brought their most rapturous music to attend Him along His way. What a bodyguard was His for the asking! 'Thinkest thou not that I could even pray to My Father and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels.'

'The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands,' sang the psalmist. They were all His at His bidding. A greater than Solomon is this—*He was rich, and for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich.* Measure greatness by the extent to which it is shared.

Let us sit with the crowd gathered on the mount that rises up from the blue waters of the lake to the blue sky. The slopes are gay with anemones and with golden lilies. Here is a lowly peasant, the look, the speech, the dress, the manner all proclaiming the simple villager. He bids them think about the

birds around them. The lark that went soaring into the heavens, the piping of thrush and blackbird, the cooing of the doves, and the croaking raven. 'They sow not,' said He, 'nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?'

To us it is familiar—but to them a startling and amazing revelation. Was not God a terror, whose voice was in the thunder? '*Your Heavenly Father.*' From His lips it was an authority and force such as never man spake. How near it brought the Almighty, what gentleness and loving care were in the words, *Your Heavenly Father.* Then He picked a flower, *a flower of the field*, without the gardener's care or hot-house shelter. 'Look at it,' said He. 'I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' The glory of Solomon was from without, crown and royal robe. The glory of the flower was from within, the unfolding of a life.

'Now if God so clothe the flowers,' shall not your Heavenly Father unfold a greater beauty and sweetness in your lives? And then He took one of the little ones. 'You are fathers and mothers. You know how to give your children what they need. How much more shall your Heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him.'

We follow one of the crowd, into whose heart the words have fallen, living, real. He steps as in a new heaven and a new earth—nay, a heaven on earth. The flowers as he went took up and repeated the message, the birds sang it. And as he draws near to his lowly house the little lad runs forth to meet him. He takes the child in his arms. Could it be true? Did God love him and care for him as he cared for his child. The house became the house of God, and all things were filled with the glorious sense of His most tender care.

Solomon opened up a new world to bring its gold and ivory to his palace, and splendour to Jerusalem.

The greater than Solomon opened the kingdom of Heaven that its power, its blessedness, its sweetness, its joy might enter into the hearts and homes of the people.

Who is the Mother?

Yet another contrast is there on which we would dwell, and all the more because it has been so singularly ignored and its beauty hidden.

We pass within the Judgement Hall wherein the king sits robed in purple, the judgement seat of ivory inlaid with gold and with a golden footstool. The steps leading to it are of ivory, and on the sides of each step the figure of a lion in gold.

To-day there is a dispute that might perplex the oldest and wisest judge. Two women lift their angry voices. 'My lord,' cries one, 'this woman in the night overlay her child so that it died. And while I slept she came and stole my child and set the dead child at my side.' 'My lord,' cries the other defiantly, 'the living child is mine, my lord.'

The king watched the angry pair for a while. Then he beckoned to the soldier while the court was hushed for his decision. 'Draw your sword and cut the living child in two, and give a half to each.' The sword is drawn. Then rang a cry that thrilled the court. 'Not so, my lord, not so, give her the child; in no wise kill it.'

'Give her the child,' said Solomon. 'She is the mother.'

We turn to another dispute between a mother and her adversaries which the Lord Jesus was to settle.

It turns upon the difference between two words that we must note carefully.

Some years ago, when I was in Greece, I said to the Greek pilot, who spoke English perfectly, 'How many words have you in Greek for dog?' 'Two,' said he. 'There is the nasty wild dog in the street, a pest and a devil.' And his face expressed the disgust with which he spoke of it.

Then, with an expression of pleasure he said, 'There is another word for what you call lap-dog, that everybody loves and is like one of the family.'

Bearing this in mind let us turn to the story than which there is none more beautiful.

Away in the north there dwelt the Canaanites, ignorant and degraded, reckoned accursed of God and man. There came a woman struggling to utter the language of the disciples. 'Sir, hear me,' she called, not daring to come near. 'I know I am only a poor Canaanite, but, Sir, my little daughter is very ill; wilt Thou speak a word and make her well?'

Jesus went on His way in silence. She followed still with her entreaty. 'Send her away,' said the disciples. 'She keeps following us with her noise.'

Then Jesus turned, and she crept to His feet with her entreaty.

'It is not meet,' said Jesus, 'to give the children's bread to —.' We can think there was a pause whilst the disciples finished the sentence to themselves, '*dogs*.'

Never could a word so loathsome have fallen from those gracious lips to a sorrowing mother, *never*. Jesus waited a moment and then used the word found nowhere else in the Bible, *lap-dogs*.

She grasped at it eagerly. 'They live in the master's house—one of the family. For them some dainty waits from the master's table.' She looked up with an adoring gladness, and her daughter was made whole.

A greater than Solomon—the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He leaves the throne of His glory, He lays aside His robes, He becomes the lowly brother of all that He may bring an outcast woman within the circle of His love, whose pleading He meets so graciously and so joyfully heals her child.

Again we seek the contrast—greatness of Christ and Solomon. At eventide Solomon is entering Jerusalem in his splendour. The soldiers thrust back the crowd from the narrow streets. The eager throng wait to greet him. Again the singers and players on instruments proclaim his coming. The spices send out their fragrance. The horses gaily caparisoned bring on the chariot wherein sits the great king. The bodyguards march beside him; the young lords of the court in their rich attire follow him. So

goes Solomon to his palace. The crowd breaks up. The show is done; and darkness falls on the silent city.

But lo, a greater than Solomon. Again it is eventide, and again the crowds gather. 'And when the sun was setting all they that had any sick brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them.' For Him no prancing horse, no robe, no chariot or show of splendour. The mother brings her fevered little one, moaning in its pain. The blind man gropes his way to the city gate. The deaf stand trying to read the latest tidings of the great prophet of Nazareth. Held by strong hands comes one possessed of a devil. And helped by kindly neighbours the lame man limps along his way. Here a silent company bend over one whom they have laid in the gateway of the city. The leper comes hoping even he will be welcomed and healed. *And He laid His hands upon every one of them and healed them.*

He might have stood and spoken the word and they would be healed. But not thus could His compassion be satisfied. On each must be laid the touch of that hand, and to each separately must the words of loving pity be spoken—'Be whole.'

Was there ever such a joyful scene? The mother hurrying home, her tears of sorrow turned to tears of gladness. The blind man bewildered by the glory of heaven and earth. The deaf drinking in the music of the world about him. The lame leaping in his new-found strength. The leper hastening to tell the good tidings. The man possessed in his right mind. The people awed in adoring wonder.

Solomon sinks into a pitiful insignificance beside it all. A greater than Solomon is here.

We come to the end of the story, and here the contrast finds its climax.

What is left behind that life of Solomon? The nation is impoverished by the extravagance of the king. The people enraged by their wrongs, rise in rebellion, to be mocked and defied by the weak and stubborn son. And later the kingdom

of Israel rent, many of the tribes lost, and those that were left were carried as captives into a strange land.

Of the greater than Solomon, what follows His life on earth? He has opened the kingdom to all believers. He is able to save all that come to God by Him. He hath abolished death; and in Him is life everlasting. The prayer for Solomon finds in Him its fulfilment—His name shall continue for ever, and men shall be blessed in Him: yea, all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be His glorious Name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen.

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day:
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of Glory passes on His way.

Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,

Alleluia!

X.

A COMMAND AND A PROMISE

'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'

—Matt. iv. 18. 19/

THE Lord Jesus goes on His way, just entering on His work, thinking, it may be, of the universal Kingdom which He has come to establish, of the extent, the cost, the difficulties that must be overcome. How shall He accomplish it? To subdue the nations, to bring all men beneath the sway of His authority? Let Him go forth to Rome and summon all the legions of Caesar. Let Him away to Athens and secure the intellect of the age. Let Him stand in the Temple of Jerusalem, He whom their own prophets foretold, and for whom the nation waits, let Him gather the priests and rulers in Israel about Him. But what can He find there? Here are Peter and Andrew casting the net, swarthy, rough-handed fishermen, stripped for their work, and dragging the net ashore. Here are John and James mending their nets, busily stitching up the rents. What does it matter what they think, what they say, what they do? Unlearned men, understanding how to handle a boat and cast a net, and knowing little more.

And Jesus said unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.

So He begins His work. So He lays the foundation of it, and so He carries it on. How do you count the resources of the Church? How do you estimate its strength? By the stately fabric which men have dedicated to the service of God? By the crowds of worshippers that gather to celebrate His praise? By the names of the learned who are found in its ranks? By the wealth of its congregations? No. Christianity began without any of these, and it is in no wise dependent on them. The strength of the Church is in the simple and loving followers of

the Lord Jesus. *Follow Me*, saith Christ and My triumph is secured.

Follow Me—that is the one thing. The command is short and sharp.

Do not wait until you are all that you would be before you follow Him. Follow Him that you may be made all that you would be. It seemed an unpromising material that the Master found in these fishermen. The people perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men. They had a rough speech, so that everybody knew them as Galileans. They came from a part of the country that was much looked down on. They had no culture and they had no influence. Yet these were to undertake a work which was to reach to the highest. 'All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him.' Well might these simple fishermen ask in wonder, 'What can we do in such a work?' The answer is 'Follow Me.'

Since this is all we have to do, it is everything that we do it thoroughly. *Follow Me.*

So many people want to be saints before they are Christians. They spend their time in thinking what they are not. They think they can settle everything by declaring that they have no gifts. They say it of themselves—they may not wish others to say it for them, perhaps. The Lord Jesus does not want our gifts. He wants us to give ourselves to Him, and He holds Himself responsible for all else. The command goes with the promise. He can do better with those who have no gifts than with those who think too much of them. Here is our business. Let us give ourselves wholly to it—*Follow Me.*

To follow Him is to find all that we need. Do not begin to think of all the good you want to do in the world, or you will be frightened into doing nothing.

Think of Peter sitting down and thinking of the great work on which he was entering and all that it was to achieve. Kings and courtiers are to be reached. 'Dear me,' he might sigh, 'I shall need a court dress and to learn lessons of etiquette.' Poor Peter!

Learned and wise men are to acknowledge him. 'Then I must study philosophy and practice oratory. The poor are to be helped. I must arrange for a subscription list and learn to keep accounts. The heathen must be reached. I must study the religions of the world, and see how we can adapt the Gospel to their prejudices. The children are to be cared for. I must devise a system of education. Great social wrongs must be swept away. I must study political economy and control governments.' Poor Peter! If you have got to do all that in one short life you had better go on catching fish for hungry men and women. You will do a great deal more good. Let us believe it, and live in the assurance of it. My fitness for service is in following Him.

Follow Me. It means that we have one will with the Lord Jesus and one way. I must loose myself from all that holds me back from Him. I have heard of a river steamer that had got up steam, and puffed and panted, and sounded its whistle as a notice of its purpose, but it could not stir. Then one saw that the huge cable that held it was fast on the shore. There are many who spend their Sundays in the same way. They light the fires, they get up steam sometimes with fuss and ado—but the cable holds them fast, and they puff and pant in vain.

The Lord Jesus can do wonders with us if we will let Him have us altogether. The first thing, the one thing is the surrender of ourselves to Him. Let there be this whole-souled submission to Him, and He will give us grace to follow Him whithersoever He goeth. To follow Him is to walk *where* He walked, and to walk *as* He walked. To walk where He walked will keep a man in the right path. There are many things of which we ask—is it right; is it wrong? You need not waste your time in such questions. Is Jesus Christ going that way? *Follow Me.* These are the marching orders. And I am to walk *as He walked*. I am to take Him as my example. It is indeed a lofty and sublime ideal, yet let us not shrink from it—to think as Jesus Christ thinks, to will as Jesus Christ wills, to speak as Jesus Christ speaks, and do as Jesus Christ did. 'We have the mind of Christ,' says St. Paul.

This is what our Lord asks of us, and commands. We cannot

afford to let our religion mean anything less than this. It is the only religion of which our Lord can make any use. Less than this unfits for service. Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ, says St. Peter. It is our defence, our strength, our safety to be wholly surrendered to Him. Mr. Facing Bothways cannot follow; he can only stay still. We have found him sometimes in the Slough of Despond, and, alas, half-hearted in trying to get out of it.

Now comes the promise. I will make you fishers of men. Men have to be caught, and we have to catch them. It means training, skill, perseverance, success—and all that is pledged to us if we follow Him. To catch fish is a very different thing from talking about it. Silence is often needful for success. We may be quite sure that it will avail nothing to stand in dignified attitude, in stately garb—perhaps afraid of getting wet—and in the greatness of our authority as Pope or Priest or Minister commanding men to come into the net. They will not come to be caught, so we have to go and catch them.

And it is our business to catch them. We are not saved for our own sake only, but for our own and our neighbour's. I am His disciple, that through me He may catch others. This high dignity is ours—to share with Christ the work of saving men.

Ye are the light of the world, said the Master. It is only light by giving itself away. The candle said, 'I will keep my light to myself,' and it went out in darkness. Many a man has lost his religion by keeping it to himself. '*Ye are the salt of the earth.*' It is no good except by contact with that which tends to corruption; preserving and sweetening it. '*I am the vine, ye are the branches*'—that through which the vine imparts itself to the world. The vine must pour its life and wealth through the branches to bless men. Follow Me, the Lord Jesus saith, and I will make you an everlasting blessing to those about you. He that saveth his soul shall lose it. It is only by giving ourselves away in love and service that we can save ourselves.

'I go a-fishing,' said Simon Peter. I go. He did not sit in

prayerful expectancy wishing for a fish to come to him. Prayer is good, but hook and line are needful to answer our prayer. He laid himself out for the work. Making ready for it, setting out to do it, and keeping at it until the fish was caught.

He that catcheth fish is wary, and he that winneth souls is wise. I sat one day beside a fisherman who seemed always to succeed where others failed. 'How do you manage?' I asked. He said, 'I have made a study of it. You see, it depends on so many things. The bend of the hook, the speed of the boat, the kind of bait, it has all to be adapted to the kind of fish you are trying for.' I came away humbled and ashamed. I said within myself, 'You have hoped for souls, but have you set yourself to seek it, have you thought it out carefully, adapting all to the catching of men for the Master?'

The successful fisher is of the Lord's making. He does not pick and choose the cleverest and most skilful. The promise is to the clumsy and blundering as well as to the gifted and great. It is all in those words, *I will make you fishers of men*. In this let the timid be made brave; let the foolish find wisdom; the weak be made strong. It is not what we are that matters. It is what He does for us and makes of us if we follow Him. We are responsible not for what we are but for what we might be.

The Art of the Fisherman.

John Bunyan, in the rhyming preface to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, tells us how the art of the fisherman helped him to become a fisher of men.

You see the ways the fisherman doth take
To catch the fish; what engines he doth make!
Behold how he engageth all his wits;
Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks and nets;
Yet fish there be, that neither hook nor line,
Nor snare, nor net, nor engine can make thine:
They must be groped for, and be tickled too.
Or they will not be caught, whate'er you do.

How blest indeed is he who by such various and skilful methods sets himself to be a fisher of men. There is a world of meaning in the words we have italicized. It means a genius

of invention, and of patient effort for the work of the Master. It is the wisdom of the soul winner.

Use *an attractive bait*. Old Isaac Walton gives us a list of dainty pastes and compounds which the fisherman must prepare. Fish are not caught with a shake of the fist and a threatening look, nor with a bare hook.

Turn to the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. There is a beautiful instance of how the disciples went scattering handfuls of ground bait everywhere. 'They did eat their meat with gladness, and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people.' And what happened? The Gospel net came sweeping along and caught a shoal of fish. 'The Lord added daily to the Church such as should be saved.' He who would catch fish must get enough religion to recommend it. Singleness of heart is the secret of success. He who is rent and torn between Christ and self will find it hard enough to work out his own salvation, much more to save others. He who is wholly the Lord's can afford to forget himself in serving his Lord and his neighbour.

It is well to be definite in our aim. Pick out some one soul, and set yourself to win that one for Christ. Vagueness and indefiniteness are the besetting sins of the religious life. We cheat ourselves with splendid resolutions, splendid aspirations, that shoot up to heaven like sky-rockets, and go out. To seek definitely some soul greatly aids the singleness of heart, and gives a fixedness of purpose which is a great gain.

Remember that the Lord Jesus is Himself the master fisherman. He could show His disciples how to fill the net when they could catch nothing. His lessons are to be had for the asking. He will do as much for us as He did for them. The Rev. William H. Tindall, whose memory we cherish in the West London Mission, told me that at one time he was troubled that he saw so little result in his ministry. Then he adopted a new method. When he began to prepare a sermon he spent some time in earnest prayer for guidance as to the text and his treatment of it. He found himself changed from vague

generalities to a definite aim. After that, he said, 'I seldom preached without some testimony of blessing, and I frequently heard of those who were led to Christ.'

Yet one thing more. I once stood watching a fisherman at work. He hooked two or three good fish, and lost them. Presently he set down his rod, and the line lay on the grass. 'May I look?' I said, and took up the attractive fly. 'Ah, it has lost its point.' Bad for sermon or lesson as for fishing. *Get what will strike and hold.*

XI.

THE HEAVENLY FATHER'S LOVE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.'

—Zech. viii. 5.

THE prophet Zechariah comes with a message from God. Let us go forth eagerly to listen. *'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts'*—the God of heaven and earth, the Most High speaks to the people by the mouth of His prophet. They have sometimes feared to hear it, and said, 'Let not God speak to us, lest we die.' But how graicous, how kindly is the message which Zechariah brings in the text.

It would have done John Wesley good if he had preached from that text, and done good to the people who heard him, for as one has said with too much truth—he treated his boys as men, and his men as boys. He had no play-time for himself or anybody else. Well, we will remember that he was ever busy about his Master's business.

Let us take the Old Testament and see how the Heavenly Father provided for the children. Whatever privilege belonged to the Jew was to be shared by them, so that it became the watchword of the Jew—the things that are revealed belong unto us and our children.

Let us turn to what we may call the *Children's Festival*, for its purpose is plainly declared—'that their children which have not known anything may learn to fear the Lord your God.' Surely we may venture to change the word fear to love.

It is called the Feast of the Tabernacles, elsewhere the Feast of Booths. Let us call it the Feast of Summer-houses. First of all, there was a week's holiday, just in the autumn season when

fruit and crops were gathered safely. The little family groups went out to the forest, and brought home the thick-leaved branches and built little summerhouses, and here they lived for a week. It was a time of much merry-making. The children were never told sternly, what we may have heard when little, that they were to be seen and not heard. The words are not in the Bible, however solemnly they are spoken. Every boy and girl carried a palm branch, which they waved joyously, and called their greetings to each other. As the day declined they lit up the summer-house with lanterns, and had music and such innocent dances as were permitted. So for a whole week.

Then once in every seven years there came a great silence. Now whatever happens once in seven years is bound to reach all the children, for the little one that is but one year old, in seven years' time will be eight, little enough to belong to it and old enough to understand it. Amid all the merry-making came the impressive silence when all were gathered, and in the midst stood the priest reading the solemn words of the law. Picture it and think of it—how that to the children the words of the law came to be brightened and beautified by all that connected it with the Feast of the Tabernacles.

Blessed indeed is it when the children are thus blest—when thoughts of God are not associated only with sermon and catechism, but with the beauty and joy, the sunshine and song of home as a summer-house; with all the tenderness and care of the father and mother.

The Passover Lamb.

Look at the Feast of the Passover, and note how through it all there is the same gracious thought of the children. The centre of it is the lamb without spot or blemish. The lamb was to be brought home on the tenth day; but it was not needed until the fourteenth day. We ask the reason? Well, let us think what would happen if, fortunate enough to possess some little pasture, we were to bring home a lamb. Would it not become the joyful playmate of the children? Would they not weave for it a flower chain? Would it not, as Nathan said, eat of their meat and

drink of their cup, and be unto them as a little daughter? Then comes the evening of the fourteenth day, with all the ceremony that could impress them. Dressed as if for a journey, the looser robes rolled about the waist, the sandals on the feet, the staff in the hand, as if prepared for a journey in haste. Then as they gather about their mother, they watch the father sprinkle the blood of the lamb upon the lintel and doorposts. Now of this we may be sure—that again and again they would stay to ask about it. And this was its solemn purpose. 'It shall come to pass when your children say unto you, What mean ye by this service?' they were to be told the story of their deliverance from Egypt, and how the lamb on that terrible night was Israel's safety—its blood was their salvation.

This was God's catechism, and we note that the children ask the question and the teacher gave the answer. Thus would God teach the children by what they looked at. What we see, lives. We possess it whole and complete without effort, and retain it without difficulty. What we hear is an effort to receive and often labour to recall. So was it with the great Teacher, whose word was ever *Behold*.

A man's character and mind are moulded for good or evil far more by the forms of imagination which surround his childhood than by any subsequent training. This is the force that abides through the years, that lingers longest and goes farthest in the shaping of the after life.

The Meaning of the Stones.

Let us take another illustration of this gracious thought for the children and the Divine method of teaching them.

It was a great occasion when the people of Israel stood on the verge of Jordan looking across it into the goodly land that was to be their home. It was the end of long years of weary wandering, the fulfilment of the splendid promise that was ever before them, a cloud of cooling shade in desert heat, a pillar of fire in the gloom and peril of the night. An occasion was it to be solemnly commemorated. Twelve men out of the people, 'out of every tribe a man,' were to take from the bed of the river,

‘where the priest’s feet stood firm,’ twelve stones, and they were set up on the bank of the river. No cold and dead memorial of the past was it, but a living message through the years for the children, a text for a sermon, and more and better still for them, a subject for the story. Twice in the record of it are the words—‘It is to be a sign among you that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones?’ they were to hear of what the God of their fathers had done for them.

Think of the shepherd leading his flock along the heights above that deep depression of the Jordan Valley. His little lad is bounding gaily hither and thither, when suddenly he stops. There in a row are the stones. Then comes the question, ‘Father, what are those stones for?’

‘Come here, my lad.’

And seated on a mossy rock the shepherd tells him all the story of how they came up through the wilderness, and how when Moses died, God raised up for them another captain and leader called Joshua, and how they crossed the Jordan and came into the goodly land of promise.

There was something to see. It lived. And with it lived that which the stones were set up to record.

The Voice of the Lad.

Is there anywhere a story more beautiful than that of Hagar and Ishmael? Let us set the scene before us. The stretch of desert sand; the sun that smites with fiery darts; the only sign of life the stunted shrub with scanty shade; and far off the vultures wheeling into sight. Along their way come the mother and the son. He, fevered with the heat, falls faint on the sand. The bottle of water is spent. She bends over him and hears the hot, quick breath with which his life is ebbing. Then she buries her face in her hands and makes her moan, ‘Let me not see the death of the child.’

Was ever such a scene? That stretch of awful loneliness so far from any help, and overhead the pitiless heaven. Then come the words—*God heard the voice of the lad.* It was but a

fevered moan, a faint and muttered sound—God heard the voice of the lad, and bade an angel hasten on that merciful errand. Swiftly heedful, he showed her the well of water. All eagerly she dipped the bottle in the gurgling well and hurried to cool the fevered brow and moisten the parched lips. And as the life returned and the child looked into her face and smiled its love and thanks in his mother's face, so did the mother look up and smile her love and thanks in the face of her Father, God. Again must have come the words of that earlier vision—Thou, God, seest me. We have seen the words hung as a motto on the wall, a thing of threat and terror. It is cruel to lose all the exquisite tenderness, the beautiful blessedness which constrained the utterance from the mother's lips. God heard the voice of the lad; the God and Father of all the children.

We cannot think that the Heavenly Father loved the children more, yet it must be that all the little ones were uplifted and consecrated by the birth of the Son of God as the Babe of Bethlehem. Who can tell what that birth has meant for the children of the world? Of all the great personages of history, there is but one whose birth and infancy has been enshrined in art, the Holy Child Jesus. No other picture is so familiar. He is ever the Holy Child Jesus. Time stands still at the manger of Bethlehem, as if the ages had fulfilled themselves in that fruition.

God, who reveals Himself in creation in infinite greatness, reveals Himself in infinite contraction in the babe. The Almighty puts Himself within the compass of a lowly mother in the Babe of Bethlehem.

How large a place do the children find in the ministry of the Lord Jesus? They are to Him not only a text for His sermons; in them He bids us find the secret of entering into the Kingdom of God.

Amidst the flowers of the field and the birds the Lord Jesus finds a yet richer and more beautiful illustration of how God feels towards us in the love of the father and mother towards

the little child. Here is the fullest token and proof of His love and care.

He sets the little lad at His side to teach those who were to become the great apostles of His Church.

It is difficult to put into sober rendering the words which tell us how Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, 'I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes.'

With what indignation of love does He declare that it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he cast into the sea than that he should offend one of these little ones.

To Him heaven touches earth in the children—'I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.'

He made Himself one of them and one with them. It is a picture to linger over which St. Mark gives us. 'And He sat down . . . and took a child and set him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms He said, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My Name receiveth Me, and whosoever receiveth Me receiveth not Me but Him who sent Me.' So is the child linked by the golden chain of love to the heart of the Father in heaven.

Have we not mistaken the actions of the disciples in forbidding the mothers to bring their children to the Lord Jesus? They themselves shrank from intruding upon that mystery of sorrow that overwhelmed Him. Peter, to whom Jesus said, 'Feed My lambs,' surely loved the children. And John, above all who moved, ever saying, 'Little children, love one another.' It was a concern for their Lord that prompted them.

But Jesus bade the little children come to Him. Beautiful and blessed is the scene of the Lord Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, when He gathered the little ones about Him. To Him who set more store by love than did any other, it was a solace and a joy. If we could choose the moment in all that life when we would see Him, it would be when with the little one

In His arms, and the others pressing around Him. The angels of Heaven could not have brought so sweet a ministry in that hour of His exceeding sorrow.

Let us remember that none are fully fitted to deal with the children until they can pass the one examination and have been ordained.

'Ordained by whom?' you ask.

'By the Bishop.'

'By what Bishop?'

'The Shepherd and Bishop of souls.'

First comes the examination.

And Jesus said, 'Simon, son of Jonas, *knowest* thou . . .'

No; it needs something more than knowledge.

And Jesus said, 'Simon, son of Jonas, *believest* thou . . .'

No, it is more than any belief.

And Jesus said, 'Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou Me?*'

Then Jesus said, '*Feed My lambs.*'

They who can pass this examination and receive this commission do become right reverend fathers and mothers in God.

XII.

ON THE MOUNT, AND AFTER

Matt. xvii.

THE story begins in the middle of the previous chapter. Jesus had taken the disciples to the Mounts of Palestine that He might find a quiet place to talk with them. It shows what a busy life He led. That three times He had sought this and twice He had failed. Once He would have crossed the lake to rest awhile; but the people saw Him and outran the boat. Once He entered into a house and would have no man know where He was, but He could not be hid. This is the third time.

It is in the early spring, and Jesus sits amidst the glad young life of birds and flowers, with the disciples about Him.

He asks them—Whom do the people say that I am? One, perhaps Thomas, said, They say that Thou art Jeremiah. Another, it may be John, They say that Thou art one of the old prophets again.

Then Jesus said, But whom say ye that I am? Peter, his soul on fire, cried, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'

Jesus greatly commended his answer—Thou art Peter—the rock—and on this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now we must remember one thing carefully in reading these words. To Peter, as to the other disciples, their one great expectation was that Jesus had come to set up a Kingdom here on earth in which the Jewish nation was to be supreme, with all the triumph of David and the splendour of Solomon. The very last words they spoke to the Lord Jesus, on the eve of the ascension, were of this expectation—Wilt Thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel? To Peter the gates of

Hell would mean the Roman forces. And to him the promise would mean that in this restored kingdom he was to be all that Joseph was in the house of Pharaoh—lord of the treasury and master of the household. The keys—the symbol of authority—were his. From that moment and out of those words came the quarrel as to who should be greatest in this promised kingdom. And out of those words came instantly the authority which Peter claimed. This alone explains that which followed.

Then the Lord Jesus began to tell them how He must go up to Jerusalem to be betrayed into the hands of men, and suffer many things at the hands of Scribes and Priests and Pharisees, *and be killed.*

Then upsprang Peter and took hold of the Lord Jesus, and began to rebuke Him. It is the word that is used a little later—Jesus rebuked the devil—'Lord, this must never be. If I am to be all that Thou hast made me in Thy Kingdom, this must never be—be it far from Thee.'

The tone, one of angry reproof, of indignant rebuke. Peter had begun thus to assert his authority.

Then Jesus looked round about Him with indignation, and hurled at Peter those terrible words—*Get thee hence, Satan.*

There followed the week of unbroken silence—nothing said, nothing done. Peter, crushed beneath that sentence, could say no word to his Lord or to the jealous disciples. And the Lord Jesus could find none of them willing to hear of that of which His heart was full—the death that He must die at Jerusalem.

The Transfiguration.

After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John up a high mountain apart, and is transfigured before them. And there appeared Moses and Elijah talking with Him. St. Luke tells us *of the death that He must die at Jerusalem.*

Now the Lord Jesus has found those to whom He could talk of that which the disciples would not hear.

Here is opened for us that which we may linger over. There appeared Moses talking with Him of the death that He should die at Jerusalem.

Moses—never was there greater hero, philosopher, poet, statesman, warrior. We see him standing amid the splendours of Pharaoh's palace, amid the stately gardens, his the highest position, with yet loftier promise. On the still air comes the curse of the taskmaster, the sound of the whip, the cry of the beaten slave. Then Moses leaving behind all that was his and all that the future promised, comes down and links himself with the miseries of poor Israel. How it cuts across all the selfishness whose only religion is a miserable contentment with feeling happy! Then for forty years away in the wilderness, learning his lesson as the shepherd of Israel. Back once more in Egypt he sets himself to defy the great Pharaoh and to lead the people forth from their bondage, and for another forty years he carries all the burden of their care and provocation. And after all that he has surrendered and endured because he speaks angrily to these grumbling Israelites he is forbidden to enter the land of promise. It was a terrible penalty for so light an offence. A hasty word, and he is shut out from Canaan to the verge of which he has brought the people through those long, weary years. It seems harsh. He has failed; heartbroken he must die.

But there is a splendid recompense of reward awaiting him, finding which he shall count it little to have lost all else. Because thou hast failed, Moses, thou hast had wrought within thy soul that which has fitted thee to render sublimer service than the highest of God's archangels could bring. Because thou hast failed thou canst stand beside thy sorrowing Lord and talk with Him of the death that He must die in Jerusalem.

There the broken life is made all rounded and complete. Life on earth is the training for the loftier ministry in Heaven, and only such a noble soul as that of Moses could undergo the process that fitted him for such service to his sorrowing Lord.

And there appeared Elijah—the other hero whose failure brought to him the fitness for a like service. We see him with a bitter cry flinging himself under the juniper-tree feeling that all that is left for him is to die. What avails all that he has

dared, all that he has endured, if that woman Jezebel is to sit on the throne defying the living God and threatening Israel with destruction. Then in the still small voice may have come the inquiry—'Elijah, splendid has been thy service, gladly accepting all sacrifice and braving all peril. Art thou willing to be fitted for sublimer service still?'

'How so, my Lord?'

'*Art thou willing to fail?*'

With bowed head and breaking heart he strives to render acceptance. Does this still small voice come again? 'Now, Elijah, because thou hast failed thy fiery soul has been wrought into fitness to take thy place beside thy sorrowing Lord and talk with Him of the death that He must die in Jerusalem.'

Peter, aroused from his slumber, sprang up 'in ecstasy,' says St. Luke, beholding the transfigured Saviour, and Moses and Elijah talking with Him. His one thought would be of his rebuke of the Lord, made more terrible by His appearance now. Then he had seen that face in its sorrow, now it was as the sun in its strength. Those eyes, that may well have been tearful, were now as flames of fire. In place of the poor peasant's dress His robes were glistening. 'Oh Lord,' cried Peter eagerly, 'it is good for us to be here. If I always saw Thee thus I should not dare to lay that dreadful hand on Thee or speak with that terrible rebuke. If thou wilt'—*not let us*. 'I will,' the great capital 'I' of the man in authority, 'I will make here three tabernacles, one for Thee,—and here is Moses whom they say, Thou dost blaspheme; if he tarries with us all Israel will receive Thee. And Elijah—do they not deny that Thou art the Christ because Elijah is not come. Now is our success assured.'

Then came the voice from Heaven, itself the assurance of its source, 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him.' The presence of Moses and Elijah was much, but sufficient and divinely alone is the Lord Jesus. 'Hear ye Him.' And lifting up their eyes they saw no man save Jesus only.

Now we turn to follow the incidents as they came down from

the mount. In a tone of wonder the disciples ask Him, 'Why then say the Scribes that Elijah must first come?'

We see these clever Scribes coming to those simple fishermen in haughty superiority. 'Why do you follow Him? That is not the Christ. Elijah must first come.' Oh, those clever Scribes, how well we know them, who spend their time in upsetting the faith of simple believers with doubts and difficulties. They know everything.

And Jesus said, 'Elijah shall first come, and is come already, *and they knew him not.*' They, who claimed to know everything, *knew him not.* They, who could set everybody right, *knew him not.* What a mercy it would be if these troublesome Scribes would but believe that there are really some things that they do not know.

Then they come to the multitude. Amidst the crowd is a father bringing a tormented lad. 'He suffereth grievously,' cried the father at the Saviour's feet. 'Oft-times he falleth into the water and oft-times into the fire.' Does Peter think again of the transfigured Saviour and of the presence of Moses and Elijah? Does he wish again that he could have built three tabernacles upon that sacred mount and for ever have tarried there? Does he shrink from the contrast between this sight of misery and of that of high glory. Alas! that is the picture of much religion, and a deplorable picture it is, a selfish enjoyment, the charm of sweet music, the sacred hush of prayer, the mystery and awe of sacred rites, the thrill of an eloquent sermon. All good things are they and to be desired, but perilous indeed if they be all. Self-indulgence can kill the life of the soul, as it can kill the life of the body. It is good to visit the mountain top, but it is dangerous to live there. Come down, come down to the multitude, and find, in ministering to their sicknesses and sorrows, the way of salvation.

We come now to the end of the story, its crown and climax. *And when they were come to Capernaum.*

Can we think of Peter, his mind filled yet with the glory of the transfigured Saviour, and recalling the promise of his

princely position in the kingdom for which he looked, catching sight of the fishing boat that lay on the water's edge hung about with the nets? Well was it with him if he could quietly accept the lowly work of catching fish and selling them. It is a poor thing to find God in our worship and to lose Him in our work. He who is slack in his duty because he dreams of Heaven is likely to lose the best of both worlds.

The wonderful beauty of it all is that the Son of God, so glorious on the mount, comes down to be the lowly Son of man, to make His home in the fisherman's cottage. We can think of the Master as He sits and rests, saying, 'Peter, thou wouldst have built a house for Me far up in the mountain-top with Moses and Elijah; but this is the house I seek; thy house is My house to brighten thy toil and lessen the cares of thy daily life.' It is ever so. We do not find God rightly in His house if we cannot find Him in our own.

Now comes the story of the half-crown.

There is a knock at the door and the peremptory demand of the rate collector, 'Doth not your master pay the fifteen pence?' '*Your master.*' Peter is only a poor fisherman, well known, whose poverty might make him exempt, but 'your master' is altogether of much greater importance. It was the tax ordained by Moses to pay for the upkeep of the tabernacle, and later for the Temple.

St. Mark tells us it was when they came to Capernaum that Jesus asked the disciples concerning their dispute as to who should be the greatest. Jesus said that he who would be greatest must himself be the least and the servant of all. Then comes in this incident illustrating His becoming the servant and stranger.

Thus the Lord Jesus exalts Himself that He may the more deeply impress His lesson of lowliness. 'Simon,' said Jesus, 'what thinkest thou? Of whom do the kings of the earth take tributes, of these our children or strangers?'

'Of strangers,' said Simon.

How simply and naturally does the Lord claim this right of kingship. But He will not plead either privilege or poverty 'lest

we offend.' He becomes a stranger, the servant of all. 'Go and catch a fish,' said the Lord, 'and get a half-crown, that give him for *Me and thee*.'

Some able scholars tell us that the fish was sold for half-a-crown, but for us it is enough to know that Peter got the money, and paid the fifteen pence for the Master and the fifteen pence for himself.

That take and give him for Me and thee. Me and thee, let the words come to us in their fullness. Let us say them until they become a song. Me and thee. The Lord Jesus would make **all** our life a matter of sweet partnership. Ever with us in the house to share His might with our weakness, to quiet our fears with His fear not, to meet our lack with His grace. It is this, all this, that He is ever seeking to be to us. *Me and thee*.

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